

# SIGHT & SOUND



INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY · SPRING 1988 · £1.80 · US\$3.50

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on The Problem of  
the Missing Film**

**'Titicut Follies'  
freed?**

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INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY · SPRING 1988 · VOLUME 57 No 2

Editor: Penelope Houston  
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BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE  
**bfi**

SIGHT AND SOUND is an independent critical magazine sponsored and published by the British Film Institute. It is not an organ for the expression of official BFI policy; signed articles represent the views of their authors.



On the cover: Ado Sapara in Caleb Deschanel's 'Crusoe'.  
Photo: Abgayie Tarscheis.

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## Rotterdam

### 'A wily Dovzhenko peasant'

If the 17th Rotterdam Film Festival tended to excel mainly in events—a day-long 'Film Parliament' discussion held among chattering tropical birds at the Rotterdam Zoo; a ten-hour 'Kino-bouffe' which alternated gourmet dishes with films about eating—the most memorable of these was surely the eleventh-hour appearance of Sergei Paradjanov, making his first trip abroad since his fifteen years of imprisonment.

Arriving in the lobby of the Luxor Theatre after a screening of his 1985 short, *Arabesques on the Piromani Theme*—a lovely if slight poetic reverie on canvases of the Georgian folk painter, complete with evocative sound effects and *tableaux vivants* resembling Joseph Cornell boxes—the short and energetic film-maker was moved to tears after a little girl presented him with a bouquet of tulips and festival director Hubert Bals warmly embraced him. Giddy and grey-haired in a manner which improbably suggested a Soviet version of Robert Crumb's Mr Natural, he declared in Russian, 'I've lived under a number of dictators. If my art is so special, why did I have to stay in prison for so long? ... Now I have all the freedom I want, but alas, at 63 I'm no longer as strong as I used to be, although fortunately I have friends to help me.'

Speaking of the 800 sketches he had drawn during his long isolation, currently on display in Armenia, and the many un-filmed scenarios he still had to realise—'23 are at home, and 6 are in my mind'—Paradjanov seemed to be brimming over with projects, particularly a Lermontov fairy tale set in a Turkish castle which he had just finished shooting, and a version of the historic *Lay of Igor* proposed by the Ukrainians which he plans to embark on next.

At a press conference the next day, he elaborated on his own quasi-fanciful arabesques—eluding questions about his early films, which he dismissed as rubbish; singling out Pasolini as a film-maker he admired (while labelling Buñuel, Bergman, Isellini and Tarkovsky as makers of bourgeois films); praising the diversity of Rotterdam architecture; lamenting the existing of shots of naked women from his short *The Frescoes of Kiev*. Despite many allusions to Eisenstein, the overall impression was of a wily Dovzhenko peasant.

Another director present from



Peggy Healey in Su Friedrich's *Damned If You Don't*.

the same tradition was the Armenian Arthur Pelechian, described by Paradjanov as 'just an ordinary genius'. Working in part with archive footage, he harks back to the rhythmically charged montage of the silent Soviets in his lyrical black and white shorts. The best of these that I saw, *The Seasons*, manages to use such shopworn devices as slow motion and Vivaldi to create a haunting mini-epic about men moving sheep and haystacks—framed by sequences in which men clutching sheep slide down rapids and a snowy hillside.

Another link with the silents was provided by Manoel de Oliveira's first film, *Douro, Fado e Pluvial* (1930), shown in a Portuguese retrospective. In contrast to De Oliveira's recent and disappointing *Nice, A Propos de Vigo*, this documentary about the river Douro is worthy of comparison to silent Vigo in its shaping of stark non-fiction into personal and subversive poetry. But the two latest films of Rotterdam favourite Raul Ruiz, *La Chouette Avençle* and *Le Professeur Taranne*, paled in comparison to last year's *Mémoire des apparences* and *Mammone*—offering respectively a near-exhaustion (one hopes temporary) of his *Arabian Nights* mode and a still-tentative foray into a new phase of chamber-drama (an Adamov play with a rotating cast of eleven).

The half-dozen films shown by American independent Su Friedrich approach the stuff of dreams from several directions. In the silent short *Cool Hands, Warm Heart* and the sound feature *Damned If You Don't*, lyrical lesbian fantasies rub shoulders

with documentary street excursions: in *Scar Tissue*, the camera's encounters with pedestrians perform a series of rude awakenings. In *Gently Down the Stream* and *But No One*, verbal accounts of actual dreams are physically scratched alongside images which represent them. And in *The Ties that Bind*, a portrait of Friedrich's German mother, the dream might be construed as the nightmare of history, and the film-maker's project becomes an attempt to reconcile her personal and political links with the past.

Unlike Pelechian, De Oliveira and Friedrich, Godard didn't put in a personal appearance. But he was visible in different guises in *King Lear, Soigne ta droite, Meetin' WA* (his own videotaped encounter with Woody Allen) and *Duras-Godard* (an hour-long chat telecast on *vis's Océaniques* late last year). In the brilliant Dolby separations of *Lear*, which are all but required to make the film's polyphony comprehensible—sadly missing from the mainly mono screenings it has received in most venues—he is at his most intractably perverse as Professor Pluggy, and a certain owlish recalcitrance also creeps into the Allen interview. Perhaps it's the presence of American movie stars that makes him defensive. In *Soigne ta droite* he's mainly as mild and mellow as Hulot (at one point, he dives through a car window with the deftness of a Keaton); and in the mutual admiration that infuses his talk with Duras about film-making versus writing, he is as benign and cheerful as his able sparring partner.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

## Australian television

### Hard times for the Special Broadcasting Service

The future is not looking good for Australia's audacious experiment with multi-cultural television, the Special Broadcasting Service (sbs). It has survived one attempt to merge with the other state-owned channel, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (abc), and will probably cling to its separate existence for a year or two more, but there seems little doubt that it will eventually succumb to those in the federal government who view two independent channels, each supported by the tax purse, as an extravagance the nation cannot afford. Their cause is abetted by a vocal lobby group who argue that sbs should be transformed into a local version of Britain's Channel 4 and use commercial revenue to fund Australian film-making.

When it began in October 1980, sbs was a remarkable departure for Australian television. The commercial channels, of which there are three in most state capitals, rely on blending a high proportion of American programmes with locally made game shows and mass audience series such as *Prisoner*, while the abc supplemented its substantial programme output with a range of British material from *Are You Being Served?* to *The Singing Detective*.

Although sbs was conceived as a service for Australia's migrant population, the station's research shows that about half the regular audience is made up of English-speaking Australians. Half its schedule is in English, while all foreign-language programmes are subtitled. The main point was that it brought to Australian screens material which was exotic and unusual: soap operas from Argentina, Japan and Greece, feature films from Egypt, Poland and Turkey, as well as the more familiar French and German cinema, a news service which concentrated on events outside Australia, and hours of soccer, a sport largely ignored by the other networks. A night's viewing chosen at random illustrates the eclectic texture of sbs: a cartoon series from Holland, world news, a German comedy series, a British documentary on *The Living Body*, a drama serial from Denmark, Bernard Levin retracing *Hannibal's Footsteps* and Kurosawa's *Yajūmō*.

The problem has been that too few people watch the station—or so the ratings say. It rates about two per cent of the viewing

audience, a figure which is constantly quoted by those who want it handed over to the abc to manage (either as another Channel 4 or nsc2 depending upon taste). Yet by world standards the service is absurdly cheap—about £15 million a year.

The root of the problem is that many people in the cities simply cannot receive the sus signal. Unlike the abc and the commercial networks, which transmit on vhf, sus has been relegated to the uhf band, and so can be received by about half the sets in use. The fact that ratings are compiled by means of diaries, which eliminates the many migrants with inadequate English, does not help. In June this year, there will be a test period with meters attached to sets, which may reveal a higher audience for the station.

The Federal Government announced early in 1987 that in order to save money sus television was to be merged with the abc. Assurances were given that the multi-cultural nature of the channel would be preserved, but the migrant community leaders protested so loudly in the weeks leading up to the federal election that the decision was overturned, and assurances given that the station would continue as a separate entity.

Now, another departmental committee is studying the organisation of public television, both sus and abc. The industry view is that it is too soon for the government to be seen to be going back on its pledge to the migrant leaders, but that within a year or two merger could be possible. Certainly, the Channel 4 argument has gained many adherents, and these are said to include the Federal Minister for Communications, Senator Gareth Evans.

The Head of Television at sus, Paddy Conroy, is not opposed to commercials on his station—in fact he would quite welcome them as a solution to his money problems—but he dismisses the Channel 4 argument; the station could never raise enough revenue to be able to commission the quantity (let alone the quality) of programming shown on the British channel and produced by independents. But he did argue for some outside form of revenue and believes that the federal funding should be supplemented by sponsorship of programmes. If the politicians do not grapple with the question of money, then sus will never be able to capture a bigger audience.

With additional finance, the station could afford English-language movies which would bring a wider English-speaking audience. Conroy cites *My Beautiful Laundrette* as the type of film

he would like to buy. The minority programmes would be shuffled off to non-peak times. 'Take Turkish films, for which there is a small demand,' said Conroy. 'I'd rather programme a festival of Turkish films on Saturday morning—even ten of them in a row—rather than run a limited number from time to time at 9.30 in the evening. I see no point in running rotten movies just to give ethnic weight to the schedule.' The other prong of the audience attack would be more Australian-made documentaries, with a heavy emphasis on multi-cultural issues.

Certainly, the drama series which sus has so far produced have reflected the concerns of an audience not normally represented on Australian television. The feature *Tudawali* portrayed the devastating effects liquor has had on the Aborigines, while *In Between* captured the adjustments that refugees from South East Asia have had to make in Australia. One popular series, *The Girl for Steel City*, was woven around a young woman from a southern European background, whose acceptance of Australian ways was not welcomed by her parents—a situation in which many thousands of young Australians have found themselves.

Yet, for all that sus has done, and its willingness to explore new and often difficult subjects, it cannot ignore the reality of the age where public broadcasting is under attack throughout the English-speaking world. Considering that both Canadian and New Zealand state-owned networks survive by commercial

income, Australia seems unlikely to be able to sustain not one, but two, national television networks free of advertising.

At this stage, advertising or sponsorship seems the only course. The alternative is being merged with the much larger abc which, for all its achievements, has never been able to come to grips with the multi-cultural nature of Australian society, and which has recently indicated that it wants to reduce the quantity of British material being shown in Australia in favour of more Australian-made programmes.

ROBEN BROWNE

## Wanda

### Cleese, Crichton and man-management

The Oxford location of a new British comedy, *A Fish Called Wanda*, seemed under firm control but unusually friendly. Getting comedy on screen is often a grim business. John Cleese, the star, co-writer and co-director, put it down to man-management, and he actually knows what he is talking about, since for several years now he has headed an innovative company, Video Arts, which makes award-winning management training films, with such titles as *Can You Spare a Moment?* and *If Looks Could Kill*. Thanks to these he is ultra-sensitive to the matter of working environment.

'Casting' a crew is of key importance, according to Cleese, and on this film people were first

checked for a tendency to wingo. 'We have also been actively trying to knock down all the usual territorial boundaries that can dog a film set.' Man-management, Cleese maintains, also means having someone firmly at the helm who knows what he is doing; and the co-director of *A Fish Called Wanda*, is, in the star's opinion, the best he has ever worked with.

'I'm really not co-directing,' Cleese said. 'Putting up my name is reassurance for the Americans that shooting could go on if, say, Charlie's back got bad.' (The principal financier is wcm, the production company the Pythons' Prominent Features.) Charles Crichton is 77 and making a remarkable comeback to features after a gap of 22 years. An editor with Korda (*Things to Come*, *The Thief of Bagdad*), he then turned director in the heyday of Ealing, pioneering location shooting on such enduring delights as *Hue and Cry*, *The Lavender Hill Mob* and *The Titfield Thunderbolt*. The Swinging 60s did not look kindly on the middle-aged, and Crichton's career in features declined; any Hollywood aspirations he may have had probably evaporated when, not seeing eye to eye with Burt Lancaster, he was fired from *Birdman of Alcatraz*.

Cleese is baffled that Crichton, whom he brought in to direct several Video Arts subjects, has been away from features for so long. 'I've always thought this business was seven-eighths mad. People are forever trying to discover "exciting new directors". When it comes to direction, I simply do not understand the advantage of youth. It's a phenomenally difficult job; most exciting young directors simply don't know what they're doing. Charlie Crichton does. That comes from having edited for 14 years and shot film for another 40. It's not a question of how you get someone from a door to a desk. It's how you do it best, given the context and meaning of the scene. At that point you are no longer operating on logic. It becomes intuition and every shot becomes that bit better.'

In his unfettered admiration for Crichton, who prowls the set pointing his walking-stick good-naturally at co-stars Kevin Kline and Jamie Lee Curtis, Cleese perhaps tends to play down his own key role in the enterprise. He and Crichton concocted the story of *A Fish Called Wanda* (something to do with thievery, greed, Anglo-American mistrust and a goldfish with the same name as a gangster's moll) some time ago; Cleese then wrote a script and staked the project with £100,000 of his own money. The idea was to retain control for as long as possible.

Charles Crichton and John Cleese.



I wanted to be in a position to go to the studio and say: We've got a director, stars and a producer who can talk studios (Michael Shambert of *The Big Chill*)—that's the deal. It seems to have worked. Once we started shooting, my strength was that I'd written the dialogue and could perhaps work quite closely with the actors and basically embroider about ten per cent, while Charlie was actually getting the picture made. I don't really enjoy the process of filming. There were some good moments on the *Pythons* and, say, *Silverado*. However, this is the first time I can say I've enjoyed it throughout.'

QUENTIN FAULK

## Alejandro Agresti

### Wine mixed with lemonade

Alejandro Agresti is, at 26, one of Argentina's youngest directors. He was certainly the youngest at the 1987 San Sebastian festival, where his second black and white feature film—*El Amor es una Mujer Gordita* (*Love Is a Fat Woman*)—won the Giga prize (ex-sequo) in the Open Section. When only 22, he wrote and directed his first feature, *El Hombre que Ganó la Razón* (*The Man Who Gained Reason*), about a man who realises he cannot write his novel, until he has first found himself.

In *El Amor es una Mujer Gordita*, the 'hero', José, is also a writer, feverishly preoccupied with finding the truth. He's a journalist on a conservative paper, reporting on the shooting of a mammoth film about poverty in Buenos Aires, by an important North American director. When José (powerfully played by Elio Marchi) loudly voices his disgust at the director's exploitation of the poor, and the dichotomy between the subject of the film and the big-budget production, he's fired.

Evicted by his vociferous landlady—for wasting time writing, instead of working and paying the rent—he roams the streets, sometimes accompanied by his friend Caferata, a typical Argentinian *machista* and tango fanatic. During these wanderings, he encounters a cross-section of Argentinian society. Part of José's quest is to find his girlfriend, who has mysteriously 'disappeared'. According to Agresti, José's character is also typically Argentinian.

He, too, is *machista* and full of contradictions. He theorises, but it's instinct which eventually dominates. He looks for love, but only finds sex; he's against the

American director, speaks up and loses his job for his principles, doesn't like what he sees around him, but he disguises reality. He knows that people disappear, are killed, but when his girlfriend goes missing, he lies to himself and says she has run off with another man. That's the Argentinian contradiction. But I have hope in young people, this is a young film, I feel that the country is beginning to change. Since I've lived in Europe, I understand Argentina much better. I was in Holland (driven there by government displeasure) for a year and a half, then I went back to Argentina's reality. I was shocked by many things. Two months later I wrote the script.'

Because of many similarities—his youth, a lyrical use of black and white photography, the semi-autobiographical subject matter, the constant presence of Elio Marchi as his hero and alter ego in both films, his original music score (where Bach and Billie Holiday, rather than sambas and tangos, dominate)—one is strongly reminded of Jim Jarmusch and Léos Carax, especially the latter. Like their films, Agresti's have also been made on threadbare budgets: for his second, he borrowed \$75,000 (Argentinian dollars), using his house as security. Agresti's evocation of a half-deserted Buenos Aires is utterly fresh. In fact, Buenos Aires—with its lost souls

eternally wandering the bleak streets—haunts one's memory long after the story is forgotten.

Agresti, however, is hardly aware of Carax's existence. As for Jarmusch, he only discovered him after he had made his films. 'There is some similarity; in the photography, for example. But his influence comes to me indirectly, through his director of photography Robby Müller, whom I know well. In a way, it's a matter of belonging to the same generation. I like to work with light and composition—black and white suits me. I'll be using colour for my next film, *Martians and Gorillas*, about a science-fiction writer who is also writing a novel. He gets confused between reality and the plot of the novel... Like the characters of my films, I'm also trying to find myself. The street is my real inspiration. I was raised on the streets, everything I put in my films is based on my experience of life on the streets.'

*El Amor es una Mujer Gordita* has three important elements, however, which set Agresti apart from Jarmusch and Carax. Its inherent pessimism about the human condition (echoes of Argentina's recent and appalling political regime); an absence of wistfulness or self-indulgence; and a strain of *humor ácido* (acid humour), a weapon against what Agresti terms '*la clase media conformista*'.

Agresti has a Southern Italian

background. What were the greatest influences of his life? 'Vittorio De Sica and my grandfather, *Bicycle Thieves*, *Miracle in Milan*... I was mad about Italian neo-realism. When my mother died—she was born in Czechoslovakia and came to Argentina as a child, with her parents—my father went to work in America and my Italian grandparents took over. No Coca-Cola for me, it was pasta on Sundays and wine mixed with lemonade. I'm Argentinian, but I feel Italian.'

GIULIANA MERCURIO

## Crusoe

### A shipwrecked slave-owner

While researching his forthcoming adaptation of *Robinson Crusoe*, Caleb Deschanel, the American cinematographer turned director, looked up Defoe's source book. The *Journal of Alexander Selkirk* contained one incident which particularly struck him. Selkirk's island was inhabited by cats which the marooned Scottish sailor trained to dance for his entertainment.

Had Deschanel considered a return to Sardinia, where his most famous film as a cameraman, Carroll Ballard's *The Black Stallion*, had been photographed? No, for *Crusoe* he had wanted something entirely different, and the original start date, January 1987, ruled out Europe. The Seychelles offered singularly photogenic rock formations. What he had not reckoned with, however, was a Yugoslavian crew (overtime in dollars) unused to American practices or hours, let alone the debilitating heat of the Indian Ocean and a steady diet of frozen red snapper. The production, which came in at some \$6m, ran into considerable turbulence, with the result that the completion guarantors were forced to step in—to the director's relief and with ultimately satisfactory results. At the time of writing a summer release is planned, through Island Pictures and Virgin Vision.

Although Selkirk's cats did not make it into the finished version of *Crusoe*, scripted by Walon Green (*The Wild Bunch*) and the poet Christopher Logue (*Savage Messiah*), there is a good deal which is arresting and new in this by no means prettified recasting of the old story. For one thing, *Crusoe* (Aidan Quinn, a rangy young man seen most recently in Britain as the psychopath in *Stakeout*) is an unsentimental American slave-owner; and for another, 'Friday' is not to be found in the castlist—though there is an

*El Amor es una Mujer Gordita*: Elio Marchi.



unnamed Warrior. 'There is, of course, that old compelling fascination with the meeting of alien minds,' Deschanel said.

Deschanel is an alumnus of Johns Hopkins, where he studied art history, and of the golden age of the USC film school. He was approached about a *Crusoe* project in 1985 by producer Andrew Braunsberg, with whom he had previously worked as cameraman on the Peter Sellers picture *Being There*. Deschanel wanted to consolidate his move to directing, after his debut film, *The Escape Artist* (1980), from David Wagoner's comic novel about the coming of age of three teenagers. If *Crusoe* has an antecedent in Deschanel's work, however, it is undoubtedly the mesmerically beautiful *Black Stallion*, another tale of shipwreck and self-discovery, and one which taught Deschanel a good deal about working with animals, of which there are several in the new film, from a taking mongrel hound to a somnolent giant turtle.

A carefully spoken man in his early forties, Deschanel belongs, judging from his private manner, to the studiously calm breed of directors. He learnt his craft as a cameraman partly under Gordon Willis, and made a start as a director on US government information films, including one recreating the Battle of Valley Forge. His notable camera credits include *The Right Stuff* (1981) and *The Natural* (1984), as well as second-unit photography on *Apocalypse Now*, *The Escape Artist*, which has yet to receive a theatrical release in Britain, came to him via Francis Coppola, who at one time intended to direct it himself.

What attracted Deschanel to *Crusoe*? A simple plot, unquestionably the best for telling stories on film. 'There is no drama in the original, once *Crusoe* and Friday become friends.' So changes were made. The cannibals in their long boats were retained, though the interrupted sacrifice was given a new significance. There was, too, the challenge of the shipwreck (one of the great sequences in *The Black Stallion* had been the night-time sinking of the liner, shot in the tank at Cinecittà).

Deschanel cast Aidan Quinn for his street-fighting quality: he did not want an immediately likeable hero. ('Many actors still turn you down for this reason.') He was losing no sleep, however, over the question of fidelity to the original: a film is a film, after all, and most people only had 'memories' of *Robinson Crusoe*. 'And Selkirk, remember, was not washed up; he had asked to be put ashore having had a vision of a shipwreck.'

JOHN PYM



Cannibal warrior in *Crusoe*.

## Clermont-Ferrand

### Shorts festival turns international

The lights dim as the audience jostle for a place on the steps, a seat on the floor. With over 25,000 tickets sold in a week, the main complaint at the Clermont-Ferrand festival this year was lack of space. From humble beginnings as a University Film Club running a week of short films in 1979, Clermont-Ferrand has become an event of national and, this year, international importance. The team, 'Sauve qui peut le court métrage', remains largely the same, cinéphiles who have worked hard to put this festival on the cinema map. Their work with local audiences—schools' screenings, a children's programme and free afternoon tickets for OAPS—has paid off and this year they turned to welcoming international visitors with a selection of 69 films from 38 countries plus 70 French films.

The bias was towards short fictions which some criticised as 'truncated features', but the best of them displayed the qualities of a well-crafted short story, enabling you to empathise with characters set a moral dilemma. Thus there were few happy 'slice-of-life' films (single parents with problem children was a recurrent theme among the French) though there was a tendency to opt for a pat ending.

Though the Grand Prix for *Le*

*Voyage vers le Filis* (Vladimir Tanaev, USSR) was disputed, the camera's roving eye beautifully reflected a widow's growing unease as she prepares to visit her grown-up son and break the news of her pregnancy. Another well-told story, *The Best of My Razors* (Carl West, Colombia) held the audience in suspense to know if the revolutionary barber would have the courage of his convictions and kill his client, the bloodthirsty general. *Virtudes Bastian* (Francisco Avizanda, Spain) counterpointed parents' hypocrisy in shutting up their children in a bread oven with their unthinking generosity towards a beggar, and managed a Bunuellesque attention to detail. One of the most striking short story films, *Présence Féminine* (Eric Rochant, France), was a powerful piece of fantastic cinema, creating secret worlds inside two suitcases which arrive to disturb a writer's peace.

Alongside traditional narratives were films which attempted to break conventions and playfully question the medium itself. *Landscape with Stranger* (Thomas Thonson, USA), at first sight a classic American road movie, proves otherwise with the complex interrelation between a radio story and some stunning visuals. *Nonstop* (Kari Paljakka, Finland) plays a spiralling game of 'what if', with characters finding a gun at different points in the story, changing the course of the film. The full circle described, however, was ultimately disappointing. *La Sautouse (de l'ange)* (Pascal Aubier,

France) plays with technical breakdown to turn an 18th century strawberry into a 20th century diver, while *V.O.* (Christophe Delmas, France) gives subtitles an active role in the narrative.

Films classified as documentary took real people or places as subjects but through their treatment rendered them as art objects, allowing the viewer space to imagine their significance. Thierry Knauff's *Abattoirs* (Belgium) refilmed black and white stills to give a powerful, poetic insight into the walls of a slaughterhouse and their memories of suffering, and Daisy Lamothe's *Devant le Mer* (France) took an ex-monk who spends his days walking the frontier between the spiritual and social worlds, an outsider waving at passing cars, and rendered him symbolic through the rigour of her film-making.

Quasi-documentary was used more that once to make absurdist fiction. *The Ratcatcher* (Andrzej Czarnecki, Poland) describes an exterminator's battle of wits with a colony of rats and his final confrontation with the chief rat and a fishing-rod. Black humour and political satire combine to make a great film in the rats-as-political-metaphor tradition begun with Joyce Wieland's *Rat Life and Diet...* and continued by another Polish film-maker in *The Cage* (Olaf Olszewski), which won spontaneous applause as the rat gnawed its way through the bar in a cage only to reveal... but to tell more is to spoil all.

CLAIRE BARWELL



The writer of *Tamas* playing a small part in the film.

## Trivandrum

### Hackles raised by Nihalani's 'Tamas'

There could be no more beautiful, or suitable, a place to hold a film festival than the South Indian state of Kerala, where palm trees stretch for miles along the coast and those who live among them boast the highest literacy rate in India. They are also avid filmgoers, able to sustain not only popular fare but also the more rigorous work of their two most famous local filmmakers, Adoor Gopalakrishnan and Aravindan.

This was the paradise-like venue for Filmotsav 1988—the non-competitive version of India's annual festival. It was the second organised by the able and personable Mrs Urmilla Gupta, who ran into flak straight away by presenting Mike Radford's *White Mischief* as the opening-night attraction. The film was seen by over 4,000 people at the open-air stadium and Meinal Sen, the chief guest along with the Chief Minister of this Marxist-dominated State, soon made no secret of his dislike of it. He called it 'inconsequential' in a press statement but, in a state which still does not allow kissing on the screen, it was generally thought that the sexual fun and games in Kenya's Happy Valley was the real problem for the strait-laced, as the great Raj Kapoor, who much enjoyed the film, was quick to notice. 'I didn't see anyone leaving early,' he said pointedly.

Charles Dance and Sarah Miles, the chief foreign delegates for the occasion, played straight bats at their press conference almost as well as Boycott, but it was not the most auspicious of

openings. The finale, with even more people sitting in front of Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor*, was a different, much-applauded matter. And finally Filmotsav 88 was adjudged a success for Mrs Gupta, who had mounted a huge selection of films and been repaid with good audiences as well as controversy.

Towards its end, the Festival was rather overshadowed in the Press by the furor over Govind Nihalani's *Tamas*, a five-hour television film in six parts set during the time of Partition which raised so many hackles that a watcher sought an injunction against it in the Bombay High Court after the third weekly episode. He instantly won a ruling against any further showings on the state-run television channel. This judgment was quickly rescinded on appeal, much to the first judge's chagrin, and the case went to the Supreme Court in Delhi. After several days when everyone connected with both television and the film world held their corporate breath, the highest court in the land pronounced in favour of *Tamas*. What mattered, said the judge, was not what was shown on the screen but the message the film was trying to convey, which was clearly against violence of any sort.

Nihalani's film—its English title is *Darkness*—is one of the best things this director, once Shyam Benegal's regular cameraman, has accomplished. It is not so much a history of Partition as the individual story of a Hindu untouchable (Om Puri) who moves from Pakistan during the strife, part of which he has unwittingly orchestrated when ordered to kill a pig and leave it outside a Muslim mosque. From then on, he gets inextricably caught up in violence. Nihalani's

purpose is clearly not to encourage the reopening of old sectarian wounds but to warn how skilful political operators can fan the flames of religious bigotry and communalism. The film states straightaway that 'those who forget history are condemned to repeat it' and while naming no names succeeds in identifying the roots of the violence that is still an everyday occurrence in India.

*Tamas* certainly provided much better than usual fare for Indian television, which tends to avoid controversy like the plague and regard dullness as an absolute virtue. It was also considerably more challenging than all but a handful of the new Indian films shown at Filmotsav's Panorama. The Parallel cinema, largely financed by the Indian Film Development Corporation, is apparently going through a crisis with the strengthening hold of television on the subcontinent.

To make its money back, anything other than a frankly popular film has to be shown on television, since there is no effective alternative circuit in India. But if television is to screen it, caution in the making must prevail. The resulting feeling of constraint could be broken by television's successful act of courage with *Tamas*, and also by Shyam Benegal's forthcoming historical epic, *The Discovery of India*, based on Nehru's book and easily the largest thing in scale that television has ever mounted in India. There will be 42 hours of film all told and it will keep Benegal busy for the next eighteen months.

The only Indian film to come up to *Tamas*' mark in the Panorama was from Gopalakrishnan, who won the *ses* Award for his icy dissection of a Brahmin landowner in *Rat-Trap*. The new film, *Monologue*, shows that he has lost none of his control and delicacy of expression. In fact, technically *Monologue* is probably his best work to date.

The monologue in question comes from the writer of the story. The protagonist is a young man whose mother left him after childbirth and who has been brought up as part of the local doctor's family. In the first part of the film, he is characterised as a brilliant pupil at school of whom there are high hopes, the envy of his friends, though not much liked for his brilliance. In the second, all is different. Now the hopes have been dashed as the young man becomes steadily more introspective and depressed, in love with his stepbrother's wife and unable to find any meaning in life.

It is very much two stories in one film, and Gopalakrishnan suggests that there could even

be more. Right at the end of *Monologue*, we see the young man as a small boy again, jumping down some steps near a river's edge. First, it is two, four, six, eight, and then he jumps again—one, three, five, seven. It is a film about narrative and storytelling but, more importantly, about the difficulties we have in distinguishing between truth and fantasy, if indeed it is possible or even right to do so. Gopalakrishnan's achievement is stylistically even more extraordinary than *Rat-Trap* but perhaps lacks the same slow-burning emotional force. Even so, it is certainly the film of a director who knows exactly what he is doing.

Apart from this, there was another good surprise from the tiny and beleaguered Assamese cinema in the shape of Jahnu Barua's *The Catastrophe*, the tale of a smallholder done out of his land by a rich neighbour and forced into penury by having to bribe the local bureaucracy even to hear his case. It's a very simple, direct film, with a superb performance from Indra Bania in the lead. And for all its familiarity, it strikes home powerfully, thanks to the quiet detail of its observation and Bania's astonishingly true-looking characterisation.

DEREK MALCOLM

## Gothenburg/ Belgrade

### A tale of two festivals

The annual festivals in Gothenburg and Belgrade share one very encouraging feature: enormous audiences. After only ten years, the Swedish event has delighted and surprised observers in a country where income from both cinemas and video has been falling.

Around 50,000 tickets were sold during the ten days at Gothenburg in early February. Audiences of 700 or so in the main cinema proved intelligent and enthusiastic as well as numerous throughout each day. They applauded Tony Huston after the Swedish premiere of his father's *The Dead*, and reacted with polite shock when he confessed that his father had looked at *Fanny and Alexander* to find the right lighting for the dinner sequence. They gave a thunderous ovation to Jan Troell's 3-hour documentary on contemporary Sweden, *The Land of Dreams*, which transcends the limitations of the genre thanks to a refulgent visual poetry, brilliant editing, and a humanist approach that questions the tenets and fabric of Swedish society while at the same time comprehending



the individual's quirks and aspirations.

More abrasive, but refreshing too in its criticism of a closed community, the Icelandic production *White Whales*, directed by Fridrik Thór Fridriksson, tells of two whaling fishermen who decide to retrieve their place ashore in Reykjavik and suffer abuse from everyone they encounter. The main character ends in the deep end of a swimming pool, cut down by police bullets and enveloped by steam like some beached leviathan.

Gothenburg prided itself this year on staging the Swedish film world's biggest bash, the 'Gold Bugs' party. Held in a vast warehouse on the docks, the occasion allowed some 600 guests to applaud Max von Sydow for his poignant performance in Bille August's *Pelle the Conqueror*, and octogenarian Astrid Lindgren, who received the film trade's own prize for her scripting of films from her much-loved children's books.

Snow in the streets of Gothenburg, but an unwonted spring in Belgrade that very same week. In a country where inflation rages at more than 120 per cent per annum, and eight Presidents bicker among themselves, the annual Yugoslav *vest* strikes one as an immensely popular affair. The main auditorium seats 4,500 people, and attractions like *Barfly* and *Full Metal Jacket* went clean within hours. As ticket sales reached 100,000, the organisers looked cheerful; understandably so, for *vest* receives not a *dinar* of official subsidy.

The programme consisted of mainstream fare, but catching up with Yugoslav production was more intriguing. Srdjan Karanovic, who shared the *vesesce* Prize at Cannes a decade back for *The Scent of Wild Flowers*, has now tackled the festering racial and political issue of Albanians vs. Serbs in the province of Kosovo—known among the local intelligentsia as 'the Socialist Ireland'. A filmmaker gets embroiled in the controversy surrounding a mixed marriage in the region, and finds his own private life falling apart in tandem.

Nearly every good Yugoslav film deals unerringly with social tensions. Not in a hectoring, didactic manner, but with a concern that lingers like a bass line beneath the action and the dialogue. Unfortunately, only when those tensions are exotic does the Yugoslav cinema succeed abroad (one remembers the Cannes Palme d'Or winner, *I Even Met Happy Gypsies*, and of course Makavejev's spiky comedies of love and death).

The triumph of Emir Kusturica's *Father Is Axy on Business*,

though, attracted the interest of the major studios after Cannes 1985. Cannon bought rights in some key territories, and Kusturica's film will soon have reaped a million dollars from foreign earnings. Thanks to Milos Forman, Kusturica's new screenplay caught the eye of David Puttnam, who committed Columbia to putting upfront money into the project, provisionally entitled *Home for Hanging*.

The subject? Gypsies, of course—and a plot-line reminiscent of Goran Paskaljevic's hit in the Directors' Fortnight at Cannes last year, *Guardian Angel*. The clandestine traffic in gypsy children between Yugoslavia and Italy continues to baffle the police. Little Caesars arise deep within the gypsy communities and sell the youngsters to Italian bosses for whom they act as thieves and pickpockets. Kusturica began shooting last September, but found the Italian border closed to him on three occasions because some of his real-life gypsy kids were allegedly on the wanted list.

Kusturica persisted with his non-professional cast, praising their authenticity on screen. 'They can make mistakes, but they can't lie. When you see the rushes, they project feeling.' *Home for Hanging* is nearing completion after 80 days in the studio and on location in various gypsy camps, and Kusturica hopes it will appear at Venice—the first time Columbia Pictures can have financed a film in which the languages are Romany, Serbo-Croat, and a smattering of Italian.

PETER COWIE

## Tigers

### Wildlife for Channel 4

If you want to take pictures of tigers, you must travel by elephant. Tigers do not sun themselves at the roadside. They are, however, used to elephants making their way through India's national parks; and on an elephant you are reasonably safe from attack.

The Bedi brothers' two tiger films must be unique in including among the credits the names of the mahouts who rode their elephants into the Kanha park in Madhya Pradesh. But the problem is that elephants do not stand still. So Rajesh Bedi made a tripod which his brother Naresh could lower from the elephant to keep his camera steady. Even this was not satisfactory. Rajesh had to add a seat so that Naresh could move off the elephant on to the tripod; to a tiger, it would still appear he was on the elephant's back.

From the tripod, he got a fine film sequence of a tiger chasing vultures from an animal it had killed. Two elephants were, he thought, being kept steady behind him, but the sight of the charging tiger was too much for them. When he turned round, they had gone...

The Bedis established themselves as wildlife film-makers with their film of the Ganges gharial, a type of crocodile unique to India. This film won Naresh the best cameraman award at the international Wild-screen Festival in 1984. They sailed in search of gharials along the Chambal river near Agra,

through dacoit country. When dacoits wanted to search their boat, they were saved by the boatmen who said it was a research expedition. They had hidden the camera equipment in the boat's fish store.

Naresh Bedi won a gold medal as best student at the Poona film school. He became a freelance photographer for Indian tv, his first assignment being feeding time at Delhi zoo. His younger brother Rajesh became a press photographer for the *Times of India* and the *Statesman* but was disappointed that pictures are not much valued in Indian newspapers. Then the *National Geographic Magazine* asked him for pictures of crocodiles, including the gharial. He said to Naresh: 'Why don't we do a film about it?'

'At that time, little was known about its behaviour,' Naresh says. 'We started work on the film. We asked the *bbc* for some money, but neither they nor anybody else was prepared to give us any. I kept working on the film, investing my own money. Then *bbc*, German tv, said they would look after the post-production costs. So I finished the film in Germany. It was the most difficult time in my life.'

The German editor, a woman, thought the gharial film should be all-action. 'But that isn't the reality. Crocodiles are very slow animals. I was afraid because more than four years' work was involved. If she just cut it and discarded the negative, that was the end of it. However, I got what I wanted, by fighting and shouting.'

After Germany, he offered the film to the *bbc* and to Channel 4 in Britain. The *bbc* wanted changes. Channel 4 offered more money for the film unchanged, distributed it all over the world and asked what he proposed to film next. His answer was tigers and elephants, and the Bedis' films on them have also been shown by Channel 4. They attracted audiences of up to 4.25 million, double the Channel's average for the time of showing. He is now seeking a sponsor for them to be shown on Indian television.

The first Bedi film, *Saving the Tiger*, covers a year in the life of a tigress and her three cubs. One cub was injured and the film drew letters from viewers asking why the camera crew did not save it. Naresh wrote to them that it was the rainy season and they found the tiger family on only a few occasions; but they did tell park officials about the cub. The other films are *Man-eating Tigers* and *Elephant Lord of the Jungle*, which was shot in the Nilgiri Hills of South India.

DAVID SPARK

Man-eating Tigers.





**CHEMICAL  
DECAY**

**COMMERCIAL  
CRISIS**

**CULTURAL  
CATASTROPHE**

# The problem of the missing film

There is a long-term worldwide crisis looming over the whole business of showing films to public audiences in cinémathèques, film societies, museums, universities. It isn't the result of a sudden drying up of subsidy, nor of disappearing crowds willing to pay to see classics, nor of decaying nitrate, nor of obstructive rights holders—none of the traditional scapegoats can be blamed for this newly emerging potential disaster. The problem lies in the increasing difficulty of finding accessible copies of films in decent condition, and the cause is a complex skein of factors none of which is easy to counteract. And yet, as film courses grow and improve, as public knowledge of world cinema increases through television, cable, satellite, video, the demand for the real quality experience is also increasing and with it the audience's expectation, almost as a right, of seeing first-class copies of major movies presented under museum conditions.

In Britain at the present time there doesn't exist a single decent copy of *Bicycle Thieves*, *Z*, *Stagecoach*, *Flying Down to Rio*, *La Règle du Jeu*, *The African Queen*, and many many more. You could find in one or other of the tv organisations perfect copies of *Singin' in the Rain* and *Some Like It Hot*, but you won't find them anywhere else in Britain. Last year the National Film Theatre in London, admittedly a large-scale consumer of films, showed just over a thousand 35mm films, plus another 130 or so on 16mm. The National Film Archive was able to supply fewer than 200 of these, and some foreign archives also helped out. Television generously loaned sixty splendid copies, normally reserved for screening electronically. But many of the archive prints were really not what the phrase suggests, for they were simply the tired copies that distributors have made available over the years at the end of a film's useful commercial life. Today very few films get a multi-print release in Britain, and although the distributors are often willing to part with used copies there are fewer and fewer of these available in the first

place. Often a film merely passes through London for a few brief weeks or months before being re-exported to supply the audience's needs in some supposedly less discriminating place where used copies are all they'll ever see.

The audiences at NFT screenings, however, have seen more and more of their films already on television and cannot understand why the cinema experience can sometimes be so much less bright and clear than the television version; the answer is that over the air it is possible to make a number of adjustments and improvements electronically which do not affect the image

## Anthony Smith

on the print itself—such techniques cannot be deployed on a 'steam' cinema projector. In any case, nmc and rrv can afford to have their own perfect copies made in Hollywood and flown in, at least in the case of films which are likely to be screened again and again. Alas, a further twist in the tale—increasingly tv companies are being asked to take convertible video copies when they acquire tv rights in films, so that often no film actually enters the country at all.

Today the National Film Archive copies some hundreds of titles every year from nitrate and makes automatic viewing copies of nearly all of them, but the programme of restoration cannot follow the programming needs of the NFT nor of the scores of other screens around Britain which may call on archive prints. Restoration work has to follow the priority of chemical urgency, and although the two needs to view and to preserve coincide, often the major priorities diverge and have to diverge. In any case, the overarching priority for the NFA is to safeguard films of British

origin (while collecting copies from every film culture); and the films most in need for viewing are those from Europe, America and, increasingly, Asia, Africa, South America, Japan.

Fortunately, there exists in London a large entrepôt and in easily accessible Amsterdam another, in which the major Hollywood companies store films which are en route for sale around Europe, Africa and elsewhere. National Film Theatre audiences are often the beneficiaries of this happy geographical accident, for copies can be borrowed. Amsterdam is wonderfully efficient and highly computerised. One NFT audience at 6 pm saw a film the need for which had arisen at noon the same day; one telephone call and an aircraft booking and the copy reached the gate with half an hour to spare.

It costs £80 to fly a film from Amsterdam, equivalent to the sale of about 30 NFT tickets. However, if it is necessary—and it often is—to bring a film from Hollywood, the cost is £200 each way, equivalent to the income from selling the whole of NFT. To bring in films from somewhere like Japan is now almost too expensive to contemplate, unless a friendly diplomatic bag is available, or a commercial sponsor for the season or a Ministry of Culture anxious to have its national products seen in Britain.

An account of the machinery of film distribution helps to explain the reasons behind the growing print shortage. The economic value of films expires very rapidly, with new product constantly clogging the channels of distribution. A very large number of copies can exist for a few months, and as the title passes through all the various stages of a modern release the copies disappear faster and faster. The film starts with its theatrical release, then reaches the non-theatrical stage and then the electronic stages of video, tv, cable. At each stage all the existing prints are fully used, spare copies being constantly called in to protect the investment.

For archive purposes, a copy is required as early in the life of the film as possible, so that the requirements of the audiences of history can be met, but in

the early months every copy is fully needed to get the most out of the investment of the distributor, and of course the producer. A copy which is not being fully used is wasted money, an excessive load on costs. Until the film is 'dead' there is no 'surplus' copy. There are times when even the printing materials themselves (the negative or fine grain print) become imperfect and no perfect reproduction of the original experience will ever be possible again. For the NPT and for the National Film Archive, it isn't enough to have a copy of the film—there must be the possibility of a permanent flow of copies and therefore of a printing copy somewhere in an appropriate archive.

A new and rather expensive process has been developed for extending the lives of prints by coating them chemically. It is a wonderful development, but where it cannot or has not been applied the copy of a film is highly vulnerable to wear and tear. If kept on the same projector continuously in the same theatre, a print can last for sixty weeks, assuming 21 screenings a week—1,260 uses. But that drops to less than half if the copy is shifted from theatre to theatre.

The Distribution Division of the BFI holds a copy of *The Searchers* (the only perfect one in Britain) which has been projected 35 times in three years and which is still perfect. Its copy of *Day for Night*, however, which was acquired ten years ago, has been projected 300 times (it arrived already used from West End screenings) and is now only in fair condition. It too is the only copy in Britain. New prints can of course be acquired and made in our own archive, but they cost £1,500 a time. One way to avoid the expense is to get a copy donated by a generous video distributor—for often the video release takes place separately from the theatrical release and in that case the video distributor will have to have a perfect copy made, without any further use for it. But that's a stroke of luck when it happens.

In looking at the brain-cudgelling and pocket-cudgelling problems of film availability, one finds oneself asking whether it is a question of faulty supply or of unwarranted demand. After all, the film buff is expecting something which the whole nature of the film distribution business is not geared to supply. An artist paints pictures to be shown in galleries or hung in houses. A writer produces books to be kept in libraries until the reader wants them. But a film-maker's medium is a short-term one; the very materials used, and the whole nexus of distribution, are not built to suit the demands of hyper-critical audiences, decades after the production, wanting to view the film in a perfect copy on a large screen. In a sense, the film culture is a flying in the face of nature, history and, most significantly, of commerce. Since the war the business of film study has opened up

quite dramatically; festivals have sprung up in hundreds of towns and even villages, all fuelling an advancing culture and a correspondingly increasing demand. Country after country is becoming more conscious of its own film history, and that of other societies too. To supply these spiralling needs with good copies will require a massive and international effort and one far greater than that which film archives have made to date; for the archives have been concerned, rightly, with the business of acquiring and preserving, not of keeping viewing copies in circulation in specialised film theatres in every major city.

Within the BFI, the tackling of this problem on the scale which modern circumstances demand is beginning to be a major priority. Only the very basic principles of progress are being mapped out, for the task is so gigantic that it could easily consume the Institute's entire resources and still leave NPT audiences unsatisfied. However, a decade from now the shortage of prints is going to be a crippling one, unless the foundations of a major international policy are laid soon.

The policy is one which affects NFA, theatre and BFI Distribution, for all have a part to play. First, one has to enunciate an important principle already recognised within the archive movement—namely, that where a film's future is known to be protected internationally, an archive can concentrate on ensuring national availability for viewing. That is, if a reliable archive in Ruritania is looking after an important Ruritanian (or American) film and has produced a perfect printing copy, then we in Britain, for example, can go ahead and use our copy for viewing or acquire one for that purpose. There is no point in everyone going through the process of preservation of the same title (costing up to £30,000 to preserve a single full-length colour feature film). But that preservation copy has to be accessible not just now but permanently in future to produce a flow of viewing prints.

Secondly, we have to step up the business of technical selection of copies which we do possess of films within our own Archive, so that appropriate copies can be set aside for viewing. Already the NFA collection of viewing prints numbers nearly twenty thousand (massively increased in the last decade), but it could be still higher if we could sort through the many copies we now possess of certain works and release perhaps some hundreds more for viewing purposes in London and the regions.

Thirdly, we are pursuing a project which we call the '360 film list'—that is, a film for every day of the year; this project, associated with the new Museum of the Moving Image, is designed to make available a flawless copy in full length of a long list of world cinema classics—all of which are fully protected at the NFA or some other ar-

chive. The list will grow with the years and many helpful donors and sponsors are now assisting in the creation of this special library. As the first few hundred films are achieved, more will of course be added to the list and the copies held in the first instance for use at MOMI, complete with sponsor's acknowledgment.

There is a fourth branch of evolving policy which is complicated but very fruitful. The BFI's Distribution Division has now acquired the whole Connoisseur collection of principally continental films and has built up a special relationship with what used to be Harris (now Glenbeck) Films, a massive 16mm library. These considerable collections and the others already in our orbit are collections of rights, often with screenable copies attached. By dint of more detailed long-range planning, it should be possible to acquire rights (and fresh copies) for the NPT and out-of-London theatres or to extend rights or acquire special BFI related sub-rights so as to recycle cash more rapidly over the years. By turning over the resources we do have more rapidly, the rate of acquisition of copies can also be improved. By identifying the really long-range projects many years in advance it becomes possible for the NFA (and its overseas colleagues) to collect and preserve copies, for BFI Distribution to acquire a selection of rights and for the NPT and other venues to schedule seasons in some kind of concert. The costs and volumes are very great, but the benefits of this long-range planning (by which I mean five to ten years range) could be considerable. The Archive is now mounting in Paris a season of nearly four hundred British films, prints which were originally prepared for screening in New York in 1985. It has cost probably millions and it has taken the best part of seven years to select and preserve and produce copies of this vast collection. (The films are all to be shown at the NPT in 1989, a decade after the project began.)

If all these plans work, we shall still be unable to satisfy the need, but we shall at least have laid a path through the decades of lost movies along which audiences of the future can pick their way. Perhaps some new projection technology will still save the situation on a larger scale. New preservation techniques may yet help to reduce the cost of restoring and preserving old copies. Airlines might decide to fly films to cinémathèques free of charge in pursuit of some intangible business advantage. But film will never settle down to a narrow official 'canon' of work; there is no academy to dictate which of the 3,000 movies made every year around the world should be kept permanently visible to specialist audiences. However much we manage to improve the flow of perfect viewing copies into the archives, we shall still be a long way behind the volume and quality demanded by our audience. ■

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# IMAGE



Production and exhibition: designer Neal Potter's sketch of the Odeon exhibit.

Perhaps, in the last analysis, the Munich Filmmuseum has got the right idea. It is certainly the simplest. The term museum is used in its strictest sense, as a temple of the Muses, and in this case the Tenth Muse is venerated entirely by the showing of works produced under her aegis. No displays of early equipment or explanations of how the magic is achieved; not even any pretty pieces of pre-cinema, though there is some of that in the next-door Photography Museum which also forms part of the Münchner Stadtmuseum. Quite simply, the Filmmuseum shows the films. And it is arguable that that is the best thing a film museum can do, since the films are the essential, and all the rest subordinate or peripheral. By that argument the National Film Theatre would be the best and the only film museum we should ever want.

In practice, of course, it is hardly ever possible to take such a loftily ideal line. Even as we enjoy visiting the gallery or reading the poem, we generally nourish a desire to know more about the painter or the poet, to have some idea of the techniques they used, to place them in some historical perspective. And that is a fair enough target for a film museum—provided it never loses sight of the fact that it is elucidating the process rather than the product. Certainly the forthcoming Museum of the Moving Image, due to open on the South Bank adjacent to the National Film Theatre at the end of June, cannot be accused of neglecting the product in favour of the process: a vital part of its operation will be the year-round running, in its own cinema, of a repertory of standard classics which will play at eight o'clock every evening. One can argue till kingdom come about which are the 365 indispensable classics, but with the *NFT* next door it seems unlikely that the choice can go too far wrong.

More fruitful argument will no doubt be engendered by the role of film itself in the museum as a whole. This is an area where a lot of film museums round the world come unstuck. Whether from shortage of cash to install the necessary

# BUILDING

## John Russell Taylor

walks around London's  
new Museum of the Moving Image,  
which opens at the end of June.

facilities, or from some more abstract notion of what a museum in general, and a film museum in particular, should be, most seem to find an inherent difficulty in integrating the films in performance with the elucidations of how they were made and the dresses once worn by Theda Bara, the original drawings by Méliès and whatever. The trick is probably not to be too tricky, but at the same time avoid undue fear of the vulgar. The movies, after all, have generally been, even at their most lofty, an entertainment medium. A bit of flaunting showmanship is entirely in the spirit of the thing.

How the integration is supposed to work on the South Bank is something like this. The visitor first encounters film, of a sort, actually working, while he or she queues for admission. The new museum, apart from obvious practical problems of establishing optimum flow, also has to cope with the requirements of the 1953 Cinematograph Act, which insists that however high-tech your forms of projection you still have to behave as though you were showing nitrate films: consequently, among other things, a maximum occupation of the building set at 1,100 people. As in any case the best number of people to have in at any one time, from the museum's point of view, is about 700, there should be scope for queuing (they envisage automatic signed admission, like a car park, so that as three go out three more are allowed in). Those waiting will be entertained with kinetoscopes, zoetropes and such, as well as provocative questions to ponder and graphic diagrams of film history.

Once in, everybody is directed down to the undercroft, an eight-foot-high basement which until pretty late in the day was possibly going to remain a car park. That deals with the pre-history and early history of the cinema—up to approximately 1918 to be precise. This is the part where most of the artifacts are displayed, though of course there will be demonstrations of the various pre-cinema machines in action. Once up aloft, passing through a Temple of the

Gods (Mary Pickford, Rudolph Valentino, Buster Keaton and such), the visitor begins to hit the real stuff. By way of the Agitprop Train (complete with one of the actor/guard/guides—of whom more anon—handing out relevant literature in Russian and English), visitors arrive at sections on German Expressionism (a dash of *Raskolnikov*, but mostly *Metropolis*), with extracts, and the avant-garde of the 1920s, particularly Surrealist, with magic moments from *L'Age d'Or* and *La Coquille et le Clergyman* playing away on a small television screen imbedded in a Surrealist eye.

The next thing to come up is the demonstration of projection techniques, ingeniously taking place in the projection booth which serves in one direction a tiny theatre devoted to Grierson and British documentary, in the other a room provided with a Paris skyline in which we meet the fateful French cinema of the 1930s. Extracts in both, so that one can see bits of *Drifters* or *Le Jour se Lève*, or both, according to taste, and at the same time see how they are being projected. The next direct experience of film comes after the animation section (with do-it-yourself facilities), and is lurking beyond a 'perfect replica' (reduced, presumably) of the front of the Muswell Hill Odeon. Here there is a screen on which is projected a sort of history of Hollywood told in key moments from key films, cut together in the manner of *Magic Images* or the 1987 film celebrating the fortieth Cannes Festival.

After that, and a quick round-up on the early history of television in Britain, abruptly stopped by the outbreak of war, and a panorama of Images of War in 330 slides ('like The London Experience, but with more taste'), we will come on rapidly to the cinema auditorium. During the daytime, it may be showing anything or nothing: anyone who wants to sit down can do so and take pot luck, or maybe get some insight into how a projector breakdown is dealt with—which does not sound so

much fun as watching highlights from silent comedy or interviews with filmmakers or whatever may be the order of the day, except, perhaps, for machine-fiends. But for any such, the cinema's three kinds of screen and wide variety of projection techniques should be enthralling. Even if only kids are actually allowed inside the projection booth to work the machines, while their attendant grown-ups look on through the glass wall at the back.

By this time we are up on the mezzanine, the top level of the museum (we climbed up through the cinema). Here television takes over, with, it is planned, a dramatic demonstration of the film fighting back as a couple sitting cosily watching *That Was the Week That Was* is suddenly blasted as their living-room walls dissolve to reveal *The Robe* or *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* in the splendour of CinemaScope. From there, by way of a glance or two at youth culture (juke-boxes and so on) we get downstairs again to the working television studio, soaps, *Coronation Street*, social/political coverage (maybe getting a little trenchant around a mock-up of Number Ten), and thence to images of the future, possibly to be scripted by Arthur C. Clarke. Up again to the 266 square metres on mezzanine level set aside for changing exhibitions (first, movies in Hensonland, then a repertory of a dozen shows rotating in the course of a year) and so out into the light of common day.

In principle it seems like a valiant attempt to integrate some eyes-on experience of the film itself with the more usual apparatus of the museum. Indeed, if it all works as planned, it should do this more effectively and consistently than any other film museum. Most of the others so far go determinedly one way or the other, or keep the exposition of film history and technique carefully separate from the showing of the films themselves. The Cinémathèque Française has its theatres, serving much the same function as the NFI in London, and it has its museum at the Palais de

Chailot, but apart from an occasional cross-reference between the items on show and the subject of the current season, there is virtually no connection. The museum is still, more than ten years after the death of its creator, Henri Langlois, almost entirely a mirror of his highly personal preoccupations, but it is also, in an odd way, a very traditional kind of museum, full of relics, memorabilia and original machines, original costumes, original designs. Though it is definitely about an aspect of showbusiness, it does not even attempt itself to be part of the show.

If the South Bank Museum of the Moving Image looks resolutely in another direction, that is partly because of the twin dangers, flashiness and stuffiness, the latter is apprehended to be the worse. Of course it is intended to be educational, and will have its databanks to prove it (access, as at the Musée d'Orsay, through computers visitors can operate themselves to find out anything they want to know about, say, British cinema). But it sounds as though the air of being educational is firmly resisted. Apart from the early cinema machines downstairs—which presumably, being machines, are not considered too highbrow—there seems to be a definite reaction away from the Hollywood Wax Museum view of things.

Relatively few personal relics, even in the Temple of the Gods: it will only be in the immediately neighbouring shop-front dedicated to Chaplin that such memorabilia will be much in evidence. Fair enough, in that Chaplin-associated images are likely to be familiar even to the kind of visitor who does not really like films very much, and therefore make a suitable token representation of nostalgia. But perhaps not enough has been done for those who would rush, when in Rio, to that curious concrete bunker which houses the Carmen Miranda Museum, or react with delight to the idea of the Will Rogers Ranch in the hills above the Getty Museum. They may be besotted, but a measure of besottedness is part of the film-fan syndrome, and that certainly has to be one of the things the new museum is about.

Though the question does arise: what is a museum, any museum, meant to be about these days? 'We don't want Britain to become one big museum,' people say to prove their distrust of the whole 'Heritage' state of mind. Going back to the root meaning of the word, one might wonder why not: what could be nicer than a country entirely given over to the worship of the Muses? But now the word has assumed, almost automatically, the association of embalming the past, rejecting change and any dynamic principle. One wonders, given that that is so, why any new institution should assume this label, except that it probably wants to take on the aura of respectability it provides and hopes to do so without the corresponding taint of stuffiness. In that respect the title Museum of the Moving Image is probably useful—the forthcoming movie

museum in the old Astoria Studios, New York, has come to the same conclusion—in that it does imply motion and dynamism, even if the purist might complain that in fact the image is the one thing that does not really move.

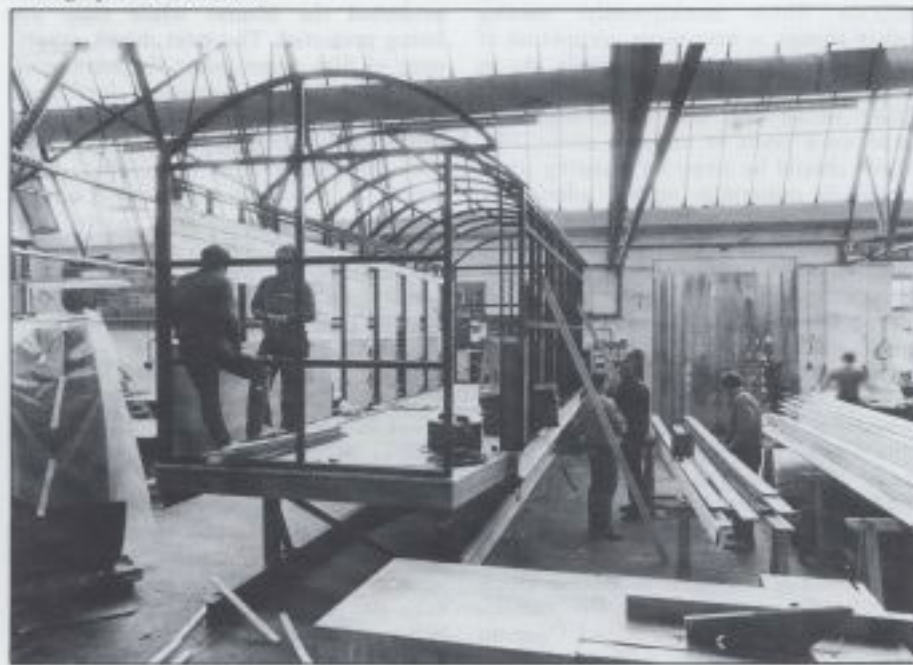
But the term museum can sometimes—as in Hollywood Wax Museum—be no more than a high-sounding name for a show. Pavilions in world's fairs may well be admirable and informative, but they are not likely to be museums in any true meaning of the term. Any more than The London Experience is. And there would seem a possibility that London's Museum of the Moving Image could fall into that trap. It is surely significant that it has a designer, but no curator, a list of audience-objectives but no list of actual objects in the collection. It is surely an essential part of a

museum that people should go back again and again, as they do to the Victoria and Albert or the Science Museum, but hardly to Madame Tussaud's. The management of the Museum of the Moving Image are of course hoping that people will return, but the main draw seems to be the repertory of standard classics in the cinema, to which one will be able to buy a season ticket. There will also be the rotating programme of temporary exhibitions and corresponding slight modifications in the material on view elsewhere (the role of women in cinema, or special effects, for instance, may be emphasised museum-wide). Which is fair: it is probably the constant succession of short-term exhibitions at, say, the Tate Gallery which primarily keeps people going back.



Neal Potter's drawing of the Agit prop Train with guard/guide in attendance.

The train under construction at Kimpton Walker Ltd in Brixton. Photograph: David Watson.





But before all else, the Museum of the Moving Image will be an experience which you pass through in a certain order, at a certain speed. It will be possible to go faster or slower, to rush through to something you particularly want to see or spend hours having a go at animation, and it is assumed that, 'being British', visitors may well insist on doubling back on their tracks. But really it is a story told in chronological order, with one thing leading to another and not much lending itself to static contemplation. In other words, more of a show than a museum. Or at any rate, a lot nearer to parts of the Science Museum than to the Theatre Museum over the river.

Perhaps this is what is required, or has to be. What the museum 'has to be' is governed in large measure by economic necessity. It has been, up to now, entirely privately financed, and though there is a reserve fund to cover the first year of presumed uncertainties and hesitations, it needs to be self-supporting from the word go. That means that 435,000 people have to pay at the turnstiles every year (admission around £3 per adult head, with the usual concessions for the young, senior citizens and so on). Which means that it must be directed at 'the intelligent sixteen-year-old student', and must answer what are understood to be his or her needs and interests. These would not seem to be very historically oriented: as in the other museums most frequently cited by the management, the Wigan National Heritage Museum and the Ironbridge Museum at Telford, history is seen as something visitors can be lured into by judiciously dramatic presentation, rather than something they might already care about.

Hence, no doubt, the paucity of relics behind glass on the South Bank—you need a bit of built-in knowledge and concern to respond to Stroheim's monocle or even yet another pair of ruby slippers—and the large number of participation games. There are not so many as originally planned (or even, I think, as in Bradford's National Museum of Photography, Film and Television, opened in 1983), since these things can come very expensive, and budget limitations have to be considered. The undercroft section, dealing with pre- and early history, may not be so different from the most recent direct parallel in the museum world, Frankfurt's Deutsches Filmmuseum, opened in 1984, but Frankfurt's presentation is much staid and more static, depending on existent interest, where London thinks that people can become interested in early cinematic equipment only if they can actually use it themselves, or have it clearly demonstrated to them how it works and to what effect.

It is saddening, at least for people somewhat over the crucial age of sixteen, that this hesitancy about the viability of history for its own sake seems to include the whole of the cinema as we have known it. True, the South Bank museum will have its miniature evoca-

tion of a classic Hollywood studio, with all the major departments ranged round a tiny shooting stage—you too can sit in the make-up department while images come at you through the mirror—and its replicated Odeon, with Odeon carpet and an old-time Odeon commissionaire. But the real meat of the thing sounds to be in the working television studio, the demonstrations of video trickery and all the possibilities for direct participation on the visitor's part. Economically this is understandable: animation apart, it would be much less practical to give visitors a role in the slow and complicated processes of making an old-time traditional cinema film than amid the instant electronic wonders of video.

Direct involvement is one thing: the overgrown schoolchild in all of us loves making machines work for ourselves

Artist's proposal for the temple of the silent gods.



and generally having a go. But it is interesting to notice also that there is not a clear division between the dry museum and the historical museum—provided only that history can be presented as 'heritage'. History is supposed to be solid and factual, based on physical remains and therefore by definition dull. Heritage means imaginative recreation, summoning up with whatever means are going to make the maximum immediate effect to the non-expert a vanished way of life or of doing things. This is where what are likely to be the most controversial inhabitants of the new museum come in: the guards-cum-guides, half of whom will be actors and half technicians.

These will all be in costume at all times, and well drilled in their roles: so well drilled that they can improvise freely within the character and the period, to answer any questions that may be asked in the right spirit and with the right vocabulary. The technicians will be doing things like masterminding the workshop in which the special effects of *Metropolis* are elaborated, or teaching animation techniques in the centre of the Brighton Pier 'housy-housy' set-up where visitors actually get their hands on the equipment. The actors will be handing out leaflets on the Agitprop Train, playing an Odeon commissionaire or a Hollywood make-up artist or whatever the need of the moment may be. Since it is supposed that they will get restive in their roles, they will be called upon frequently to change them, probably doing quick changes in the Hollywood costume department, or retiring somewhere behind the scenes for more radical overhauls of appearance.

At the Wigan National Heritage Museum the customers seem to love it, and that is where the idea basically came from. No doubt there will always be a few awkward customers who find the whole business too knife-edge for comfort, hoping/fearing that the mask will drop and we shall realise all too clearly that an extra in a cat-suit always looks like an extra in a cat-suit. At Wigan there are those—the majority, it seems—who like the idea of being caught for a couple of hours in a succession of commercials for wholemeal packaged bread or country-tasting margarine (with occasional grimmer touches from a classy *uncle* docudrama), and there are that smaller band who think it a bit silly and patronising.

At any rate at the Museum of the Moving Image it will, in principle, be all go. Moving targets are, they say, more difficult to shoot down, and one cannot argue in principle with the idea of depicting a dream factory through a dream factory, or elucidating the world of showbusiness with a show in its own right. A show that is really a show/Sends you out with a kind of a glow. . . And, very probably, a resolution to come again. Of course a museum-type museum can do that too. The only trouble is that no one has bothered to write a song about it yet. ■

# SOVIET TV

— WILLIAM FISHER —

TONIGHT

'Among the thousands of reporters [in Washington] to cover the Summit, the official Soviet government press machine—also called the "propaganda machine". It's got a new party line on relations with the USA.'—Dan Rather, anchorman of CBS Evening News, reporting on the 'glasnost menagerie'.

The American network *cbs* covers preparations for the Washington Summit. The lead story: Ukrainian and Afghan émigré groups protest Soviet First Secretary Gorbachev's presence in Washington for the disarmament talks. A T-shirt with a hammer and sickle is set ablaze. Then a change of tone, a wink and a nudge from the *cbs* anchorman. And millions of the network's Evening News viewers are told that Soviet television is gearing up to cover the Summit in a concerted effort by the Soviet 'propaganda machine' to 'sell' a 'new party line' to the Soviet people.

It is in part because of the advanced stage of exhaustion that has overtaken western media—evidenced by the tired tactics of the above report—that we can appreciate the dawning sophistication of the media in the Soviet Union. In part, too, analysts in the West have eagerly seized on this sector of Soviet life for study because, in a world brought to us by the media, we can best understand a society through its television. Innovations in Soviet broadcasting can be scrutinised for hints of developments at other levels of Soviet society, politics and culture, and—as is increasingly the practice on American television—we can take the documentation right off the Soviet tv screen.

But the distinct changes taking place in Soviet media have been put to more advanced uses than prime time comminuting by network newscasters. American think tanks and Soviet studies centres, from the conservative Rand Corporation to the liberal Harriman Center at Columbia University, have long monitored Soviet television for strategic purposes—and with increasing interest in the last two years, as it becomes an ever clearer window on the USSR and a more useful tool of Kremlinology.

Soviet affairs analyst Alex Alexiev, writing recently in the *Los Angeles Times*, referred to the pre-Summit broadcast on Soviet television of a play by Fedor Bulatskiy. The play depicted a tug of war between a shrewd, innovative Communist Party leader and an unyielding old guard ideologue opposed to rash reform. For Alexiev, the broad-



Mrs Thatcher interviewed for Soviet television.

cast represented a frank, albeit 'coded' portrayal of the clash between Gorbachev and Party number two Yegor Ligachev, and the current conflict between the progressive Politburo and the conservative Communist Party Secretariat.

Western observers also spent a good deal of time reflecting on the meaning of Soviet television's rebroadcast of Mr Gorbachev's interview with the American network *nbc*. The interviewer's questions about the limit of Gorbachev's discussions with his wife Raisa, as well as Gorbachev's response, 'We talk about everything', did not appear on the Soviet broadcast. Could that be an indication of official disapproval of the Soviet First Lady's prominence? Or is it just a matter of broadcast formats and time restrictions—such as those that have always limited the scope of western commercial television? How transparent are the new Soviet media?

'Television reflects life,' answers Henrikius Yushiavitshis, vice-chairman of the USSR State Committee for tv and Radio (Gostelradio). 'And as life becomes more interesting and complex, so does television.' Since March 1985, the date of the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union that launched current programmes of reform, Yushiavitshis' organisation has been working overtime to reflect the interesting and complex developments that have been taking place in the USSR.

Gostelradio, the Soviet broadcast authority, is a ministry of sorts with a member of government at its head and employs more than 82,000 people. Its operating budget is over 2b roubles (\$3b), of which more than 1.4b roubles (\$2.1b) goes to the Soviet Union's two national television channels. These channels reach 90 million tv sets spread over the USSR's ten time zones (by way of an efficient satellite relay system) in 45 languages. The first channel covers 90 per cent of the country, broadcasting three hours a day of general interest programming (news, sport, drama, films, musical and children's programmes). The second channel also offers nationwide coverage, but with only 48 per cent reach and a programme variety similar to that of the first, supplemented by material of a cultural nature from the local networks in the republics. Frequent satellite exchanges with other socialist nations also add to the selection.

For a long time, Soviet television conjured up associations of interminable black and white broadcasts of folk-dancing from the far-flung republics. But since 1985 Alexander Yakovlev, Soviet Propaganda Chief (his official title), has been pushing for both new content and a new look. Recent programme additions like *Twelfth Floor* or the Leningrad-based *Musical Ring*, talkshows intercut with rock videos and live performances aimed at young

people, represent an attempt to capture audiences long alienated by bland, institutional offerings. Two current events talkshows, *Problems, Research, Solutions* and *What? When? Where?*, have startled even the most cynical of Soviet televisioners by offering interviews with moderate and liberal intellectuals, even leaders of agriculture and industry, who are subjected to probing call-in questions from viewers at home.

The character of news coverage—especially of the nightly news programme *Vremya (Time)*—has changed even more markedly than entertainment programming since March 1985. The unrestricted and unedited telecasts of addresses by Margaret Thatcher and American Secretary of State George Schultz during their trips to the USSR give an indication of the extent of the new openness to foreign opinion. The advent of 5-minute international news updates called *Studio 20*, or routine reports of disasters and battles from Afghanistan, provide still more convincing evidence that *glasnost* in Soviet television is less a public relations ploy for the benefit of the West than an attempt genuinely to inform Soviet viewers of world events. Likewise, televised debates such as a 7-minute exchange between a former *New York Times* Moscow correspondent and prominent Soviet media figure Vladimir Posner, or satellite link-ups with the West such as the 'Citizen's Summit' featuring Posner and American talk-show host Phil Donahue, have given new range to televised public discourse in the USSR.

But Soviet television has perhaps lost its former bleak but distinctive character less through such programming, or the increased number of western films programmed on Thursday evenings, than through Gostelradio's new concern with cutting up and repackaging broadcast time and space, of recreating the cadence perfected by American television. Soviet television is working to reach out to and hold a domestic audience it has always taken for granted, and to do so it is adopting the proven

methods of western broadcast techniques developed through competition for ratings: to vary the presentation of programming and tailor it to the assumed short attention span of the TV viewer. The new presentation of material in a dialogue format, the uses of multiple points of view, man-in-the-street opinion and two-person commentary are western techniques intended to create the appearance of pluralism and diversity of perspective within Soviet television. Live broadcasts, use of computer graphics and attractive commentators, hand-held camerawork, rapid editing—all now make programmes more heterogeneous in appearance and more immediately engaging for the viewer.

The use of programming and techniques from the West appears to be part of a larger fascination with the non-socialist world in general and the USA in particular that has seized the Soviet Union in the last two years. In May 1987, Soviet television surprised its critics by broadcasting *The Day After*, a controversial American made-for-TV movie about life in the United States after a nuclear war—a war started by a Soviet offensive. After threatening reprisals against the sponsoring network ABC's Moscow bureau, the Soviets gave daily reports of American reaction to *Amerika*, the notorious mini-series about a Soviet takeover of the USA. And since March 1985 there has been three times more coverage of the US on Soviet television than of the USSR on American TV.

Soviet television's treatment of the US peaked in its reporting of the Washington Summit last December—which assumed a very different character from coverage of the 1985 Geneva Summit, when *Vremya* only once reported an American official's words. During the Washington Summit, Soviet TV curtailed its frequent news stories on topics like homelessness in the USA, substituting instead features about American folk music. Even the American children's show host Mister Rogers appeared on the Soviet kiddie broadcast *Good Night, Little Ones*. And this time,

official statements from the American negotiators appeared extensively, together with complete and faithful translations, on large video projection screens in central Moscow.

The Soviets are seeking to develop other forms of visual media as well along lines that bear a resemblance to western models—with some significant differences. A new state organisation, Videofilm, has been founded to spearhead video production and to minister to the owners of Soviet-made Elektronika and imported VHS recorders (some 500,000 of which enter the country legally each year—perhaps just as many illegally).

According to Oleg Uralov, head of the organisation, Videofilm will have produced 100 hours of material by the end of 1990, and by 1995 annual output is targeted at 300 hours. This will also serve as a partial solution to the perennial Soviet problem of shortage of raw film stock which hampers the production and theatrical distribution of feature films. Uralov indicates that Videofilm advocates the development of collective rather than individual viewing habits and VHS ownership. He hopes that viewing will take place in large video halls, of which 100 are already in place (outfitted, significantly, with foreign equipment), with another 1,900 expected to open within two years.

Uralov also claims that 500 video libraries offering 800 titles have been promised in 1988, though currently only two can be found in Moscow, with 500 Soviet and 100 foreign films on offer. Daily rental rates at present run at a whopping \$7.70, but that price is expected to come down.

As a result of such prices, an extensive circle of video owners (many of whose machines are unregistered) circulate for collective viewing clandestine copies of films that are not available in the USSR—and charge stiff admission prices to spectators. But as a signal that this development, too, is now recognised and in the process of being addressed by Soviet public policy, the journal *Literaturnaya Gazeta* last May printed a

Breakfast linkup: Soviet viewers see the first edition of the *Washington Post*, American viewers *Pravda*.





The Summit signing as seen on a Moscow street.

letter to the editor on the subject of the underground video market in its new column, 'Videoclub'.

Although innovations in television and developments in video have brought the Soviet media closer to its western counterpart in appearance, the goals of this overhaul are decidedly not to mobilise consumers or to put a VCR in every Soviet living-room. The authorities are counting on their new media policies to facilitate their access to an attentive Soviet public. Finger-wagging observers in the West who argue that more open media is just a new guise of totalitarian control must also recognise the risk that comes with Soviet emulation of western broadcast techniques and the introduction of democratic mechanisms in a closed, centralised society. They must recognise, too, the great success that Gostelradio has enjoyed with these techniques—to the detriment of the American networks.

The deft Russian response to the red-baiting series *Amerika*, for example, was an offer to purchase rights to the 14½-hour mini-series for broadcast on Soviet tv (an offer later withdrawn because of its poor ratings in the US) and to organise a televised 'Peace Forum' in Moscow with participation by western celebrities. As ABC attempted unsuccessfully to ride the American wave of anti-communism for profit with its mini-series, the Kremlin parlayed American knee-jerk reaction into international prestige for the USSR.

In an effort to forestall another such Soviet coup, the American media covered the Washington Summit in a dutifully accurate but cagily anti-communist fashion which stressed topics like the Soviet 'media blitz' and addressed not the content of Soviet proposals but rather their form. Sources quoted in the mainstream American press supported the much publicised thesis that Mr Gorbachev is 'beating the "Great Communicator", President Reagan, at his own game.' The press sought out such comments as one Reagan administration official's testimony that 'Gorbachev is like a travel-

ling salesman.' 'I was a little surprised at the salesmanship factor,' said another. 'When a product like this [Gorbachev] hits a market like this [the American media],' confided yet another, 'it's automatic.' In the words of *ms Evening News*, 'Gorbachev must come across looking like a million roubles to global television audiences.'

While the picture that the American press painted of Gorbachev as corporate CEO and media hound in one is not untruthful, for all its cynicism, it fails to indicate that a figure who has risen on the strength of the media is now at its mercy—another feature he shares with the 'Great Communicator'. And if it is a calculated risk that Gorbachev is taking, it remains a risk with very high stakes.

While Gorbachev cannot change the mandate of central control by the Party, he has decidedly changed its dynamic by finding space in the Soviet Constitution to grant greater autonomy to individual initiative. But that development, together with policies of 'openness' and 'democratisation', can only succeed if it is accompanied by the creation of an informed citizenry through a hitherto non-existent public sphere. Gorbachev has thus far succeeded in pushing a one-party system towards the social (if not the political) model of social democracy so quickly because he has given media reform equal priority with social reform. He recognises that such a model is most effectively created through a 'transparent' media that engages the participation of society in the free exchange of ideas while at the same time limiting that participation and the scope of those ideas. A vital, multifarious public sphere in the Soviet one-party system finds its 'Free World' complement in the combination of apparent diversity and essential sameness of American television's dozens of channels.

The view that such changes in the Soviet Union are a tacit admission of the superiority of western ways would falsely imply that the West has a patent on indirect political control through

mass communication. Western critics are closer to the mark when they contend that the principal goal of the new Soviet leadership is increased domestic and international competition or, in the words of one writer, 'not to export revolution so much as Soviet goods.' More than anything else, these reforms are attempts by the Soviet leadership to reap the fruit of western market methods—here a heterogeneous broadcast media and an active video industry—for the benefit of a new Soviet managerial class. The free dissemination of information and the appearance of transparency in the media (what Marxists have called 'repressive tolerance'; where everything is permitted, nothing is subversive) could serve this class well, permitting it to experiment with the introduction of competition and capitalist methods into the Soviet economy while giving the appearance of liberalising Soviet society. It is uncertain, however, whether 'open' media can exist in a centralised socialist state, or whether other areas of Soviet life, too, must eventually yield to the power of media that transforms society, culture and politics as it represents them.

Those who argue for a fundamental affinity between East and West on humanist grounds are correct—but for the wrong reasons. The newest link between the superpowers is the shared logic of an autonomous media that freely creates a public sphere in its own image. Executives at the American networks and *apparatchiki* at Gostelradio alike must address themselves to audiences of countless nationalities and languages. And just as the American media can no longer dump its products on a non-competitive international market, the Soviet media can no longer lay claim to a captive multi-ethnic domestic audience. In the post-Summit period, perhaps East-West confrontation will take the form of a media war of non-combatants: parity will no longer be measured in terms of warheads, but by television ratings and per capita penetration of video recorders. ■

# A VERY BRITISH COUP

Julian Petley

Long before *Spycatcher*, British cinema and television had become sensitised to the conspiracy theme. There has been nothing to match, in scale or coherence, the famous Hollywood 'paranoia' cycle (*All the President's Men*, *Three Days of the Condor*, *The Parallax View*, *Executive Action*, etc). But the last few years have seen a remarkable number of works which, in their various ways, have reflected doubts about central institutions of the British state.

For example, Central Television's first major drama series, *Much and Brass* (1982), was a powerful exposé of municipal corruption, a theme which is also to the fore in *The Long Good Friday* (1979) and echoed in *Empire State* (1987). *The Detective*, a 1985 television series, this time from the BBC, explored such themes as the covert growth of a national police force, illegal surveillance of 'the enemy within' and corruption at high levels of government. The growth of the 'state within the state' was the subject of the BBC film *In the Secret State* (1985, from Robert McCrum's novel) and also of Britain's first fully-fledged contemporary paranoia movie, *Defence of the Realm* (1985). Interestingly, the latter also emphasises the role of the media—as fearless investigators of corruption and as a means of keeping the public in the dark about shady doings in the corridors of power (a theme which also informs *The Ploughman's Lunch*). *Defence of the Realm* is also concerned with the effects of the American military presence on the British system of government, a subject central to the most celebrated of the works considered here, the disturbing BBC series *Edge of Darkness*, which wedded worries about the nuclear issue to apprehensions about Britain



Ray McAnally in *A Very British Coup*.

becoming an increasingly secretive and authoritarian American satellite.

The 1987 film *The Whistleblower*, which concerns itself with GCHQ Cheltenham, also raises questions about American involvement with the British security services, but *Edge of Darkness*' nearest relation is actually the author Troy Kennedy Martin's earlier BBC series *The Old Men at the Zoo* (1982). A considerable reworking of Angus Wilson's novel, this is a frightening parable of a sclerotic but still powerful and malevolent establishment pushing the country into a nuclear war. And its post-apocalyptic finale, with the country

a wasteland governed by a savagely authoritarian regime, resembles nothing so much as the visions conjured up by Derek Jarman in parts of *Jubilee*, *The Last of England* and his videos for *The Smiths*, *The Queen Is Dead* and *Panic*. No one would describe Jarman's films as political analyses of contemporary Britain, nor are they intended as such; but they do radiate a very powerful sense of oppression, a sense that something is rotten in the British state. Similarly, two very different films structured around journeys across contemporary Britain, *Fords on Water* (1983) and *Rocinante* (1986), both make

considerable play with the ominous iconography of the police state.

Are these films and tv series, with their shared preoccupations and overlapping landscapes, tapping into a national mood? What do some of the film-makers make of it? For Lynda Myles, producer of *Defence of the Realm*, 'The real question is, why has it taken so long for these films to be made, given that the things they explore have been around for some time now? The script of *Defence of the Realm* actually dates back to 1980, when some people might still have thought it was just a paranoid fantasy, left-wing conspiracy theory. But it turned out to be extremely prophetic. The making and release of the film coincided with the Tisdall and Ponting cases, and it was almost as though the government were playing into our hands. Since the John Stalker and Peter Wright affairs, the public are even more aware of official intrigue, and prepared to recognise that it does indeed exist. Over and above this, however, the English have always been completely obsessed with spies. I'm sure it's all tied up with that very English love of concealment, and the unwillingness or inability of the English to show their real feelings.'

Troy Kennedy Martin argues that in the past British television has been unable to deal with such themes as much as it would have liked because of censorship problems, and compares British tv's periods of silence over governmental wrongdoings with the conduct of French television during the Algerian war. 'There have been huge changes in political life over the last fifteen years which have not been adequately reflected in television drama. And if these themes have surfaced it has tended to be in prestigious one-offs, not in series or other forms of popular television. It was not until people like Jonathan Powell came along and began to do series like the *le Carré* adaptations and *The Old Men at the Zoo* that people stopped being defensive and snobbish about the series format. And there have now been some useful changes in the structure of the *bbc* which mean that "serious" drama is no longer seen as being solely the province of the single film.'

As to the nerve that *Edge of Darkness* struck for its audience: 'It dealt with a conflation of worrying trends—the increase in official secrecy, the growth of the nuclear industry and the power of Whitehall. In our story we show that plutonium has become a means whereby civil servants can maintain and increase their power base, and this produces a momentum which leads inexorably towards the growth of the state within the state.' He adds: 'Le Carré blurred the distinction between "them" and "us" in international terms. The old, traditional enmities that lay behind so many spy stories have finally been played out. Now people are worried about other things: about the centralisation of the British state, about

the way in which the country is sliding towards the status of a Balkan republic or a mere satellite of the United States, about the influence of the war in Ireland on civil liberties on the mainland, and of course about the absurd, bizarre secrecy regulations.'

Derek Jarman perhaps has more cause than most to feel paranoid, given the obscene phone calls and death threats that followed the Channel 4 screenings of *Sebastiane* and *Jubilee*, and the extraordinary difficulties which he has faced in trying to fund his films. At the time I spoke to him, he was also preparing a response to Norman Stone's vituperative attack on *The Last of England* in the *Sunday Times* (10 January, 1988). In Jarman's view, the current spate of conspiracy films and series is to be seen as a direct response to government actions.

'The Tories are hellbent on tightening the reins and dismantling the state as we know it. In particular they want to smash all the liberalising achievements of the 60s, especially in the areas of sexuality or culture. There is a deliberate, coherent plan behind individual items of legislation, an attempt to put the clock right back. At the moment you can see this particularly clearly in the appalling Clause 28, which threatens to take away the civil rights of gay people.

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## **'The English have always been completely obsessed with spies'**

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There is nothing in *The Last of England* and *Jubilee* that you can't see around you today. We're no longer dealing with the "nice" old Tory party—it has been taken over by Little Englanders and Poudjadists of the most rabid kind. The Left, however, has also failed abysmally, and the lack of an effective opposition makes it easier for the Right to do its dirty work, and further encourages people's sense of helplessness and paranoia. For far too long in the 60s and 70s, Labour gave itself up to short-term pragmatism. All it was really interested in was staying in power. There was no long-term social planning, no conviction, no sense of overall direction, and certainly no interest in cultural politics. So the problems we face at the moment stem from the failures of the Left, as well as the successes of the Right.'

Although set in the near future, Channel 4's forthcoming series *A Very British Coup*, the latest entry in the conspiracy stakes, also carries echoes of the Wilson/Callaghan era to which Jarman refers so disparagingly. It is based on the novel by Labour MP Chris Mullin, which was written in the late 70s and put flesh, in fictional form, on

some of the rumours and allegations about plots to destabilise the Labour government, which were then generally dismissed as mere paranoia on the part of Harold Wilson and his associates. The prime minister hero of *A Very British Coup*, however, is no latter-day Wilson, but a committed left-winger, a former steel worker from Sheffield heading a Labour government elected with a large majority on a radical ticket and pledged to repair the ravages of Thatcherism. Those who didn't vote for him, however, are determined to bring his government and indeed his whole life tumbling about his ears...

Cynics might choose to see *A Very British Coup* as an attempt to cash in on *Spycatcher*. But in fact this project, like *Defence of the Realm*, has had a long gestation period. As the series' co-producer, Sally Hibbin, points out, the *Spycatcher* furore actually made life more difficult. 'When *Spycatcher* came out, we really had to rethink the whole thing. Our original script was in a way quite gentle, and as the Wright allegations emerged we realised that the reality was much harder and tougher than in our story. We then had to make it all sharper.'

At this point, it was still hoped to make *A Very British Coup* as a feature film, and indeed the original script money had been raised from the National Film Development Fund. However, this was not to be. At first all concerned were disappointed, but then realised that they could turn the situation to the story's advantage. As director Mick Jackson (*Life Story*, *Threads*, *People from the Forest*, *A Guide to Armageddon*) put it: 'We realised that our story would be much better for the change to television. A movie has to have international appeal, so you can't assume a great deal about the audience's basic level of political awareness. You can't have glancing references to Joe Gormley or work-to-rules, you can't play on the niceties of British politics, so you tend to lapse into crude simplifications.' The series' scriptwriter, Alan Plater, agrees: 'Once we had agonised for a while, we did feel as though a load of chains had been cut in the ways in which we could think about the story. We no longer had to aim everything at farmers in Wisconsin.'

Mick Jackson also feels that *Spycatcher* has been something of a mixed blessing. 'What once might have seemed far-fetched and speculative to some people is now in danger of becoming old hat. At one stage we felt we were reading the latest draft of our script in the Sunday papers. Part of the film is about what happens when a British government tries to get rid of American nuclear bases, and the making of it coincided with the Reagan-Gorbachev arms talks. There is also a sterling crisis, and the filming coincided with the October stock market crash. So all the time we have had to second-guess events in the real world. For instance, if we show a cruise missile being disarmed at Greenham, will we have been

trumped by the real thing happening on television news a few days before? And would there still be any nuclear missiles for Labour to get rid of? As Harold Wilson said, a week is a long time in politics. These are the dangers of topicality, but then again *A Very British Coup* is meant to be a dangerous series.'

Sally Hibbin thinks that the current vogue for films and series about conspiracy has something to do with the public's changing perceptions of the state. 'Until Thatcherism, there wasn't in most people's minds this thing called "the state" which was separate from the country as a whole. It was something that was just a part of the country, like the health service. What Thatcher has done, and nowhere more clearly than in the Ponting and Tisdall cases, is to turn the state into something which is identifiable as an organism, something more obviously there.'

'In America you have bodies like the CIA which operate quite openly, so that it is much easier to identify the manipulations of the state—hence the early appearance of the political thriller there. In Britain the idea of the state is only just becoming part of people's thinking, which is why Peter Wright's revelations of dirty deeds by the security services still shock so many of them. The appearance of the state as a force to be reckoned with in these movies also has to do with the breakdown of consensus politics. While consensus existed, the workings of the state were part of the consensus, even if there were nasty things going on secretly behind the

scenes. But at least there were areas where Left and Right agreed, and this made the operations of the state seem "natural" and taken for granted. Once you break that consensus, the battle lines are fundamentally redrawn, and then the workings of the state become at once more obvious and more controversial.'

The co-producer of *A Very British Coup* is Ann Skinner (*The Return of the Soldier*, *The Kitchen Toto*). 'Most people simply haven't yet taken in the enormity of what Peter Wright is talking about, namely the security services trying to undermine a democratically elected British government. And if they haven't taken this in, that is at least partly the fault of the press, since most papers have actually taken precious little interest in this aspect of the whole affair. So we think it's important to dramatise these things in an interesting and entertaining way on television. Not that *A Very British Coup* is in any sense a dramatisation of *Spycatcher*, though it does cover some of the same ground, albeit from a very different point of view, in fictionalised terms and projected into the future.'

'The Tories have put themselves into the frame by their insistence on secrecy,' says Alan Plater. 'This attitude implies that there are lots of vital secrets lying around and that if they were released the sky would suddenly turn black with Russian paratroopers. Not unnaturally, people wonder what these secrets are and start to look for them. In my opinion, the government's deter-

mination to keep things from people is an example of an over-developed "them and us" attitude. Politicians live in a self-enclosed world. Perhaps it would help if the seat of government were moved halfway between Leeds and Manchester.'

Plater also agrees with Lynda Myles that the English are peculiarly obsessed with stories to do with intrigue and spying. 'It all stems from the public school system. Many people who have been through it never really escape from it, and never really mature emotionally. The network of MI5/MI6/Whitehall is a projection of the system into public life, and all the rivalries and battles in this enclosed, exclusive little world are really like house matches.'

Mick Jackson takes a slightly different view of the conspiracy cycle. 'There is a vague anxiety, a feeling deep down that things are spiralling out of control, that the rules of the game have changed. It is an inarticulate, unexpressed feeling, but it is definitely there. Films like *A Very British Coup*, *Defence of the Realm* and *Edge of Darkness* help to legitimise such feelings. They help people to realise that they are not alone in their worries, that they are not crazy or paranoid, and that there really is a hidden, unanswerable face of authority beneath the acceptable public mask.' In other words, the message from *A Very British Coup* and its predecessors is that in a country that has spawned Peter Wright and his cronies no one can justly be called paranoid: it's all true. ■

*A Very British Coup*: Mick Jackson (centre) and Ray McNally. Photos: David Appleby.





Titicut Follies

*Titicut Follies*, Frederick Wiseman's by now legendary documentary about life at Bridgewater State Hospital, Massachusetts, has been banned for public screening since it was made twenty years ago. Now, once again, Wiseman is fighting to free his film.

# TITICUT FO

**A**t the time of writing, Frederick Wiseman's film *Titicut Follies* is the only work that has had restrictions placed on its use by a United States court for reasons other than obscenity or national security. I say 'at the time of writing' because, twenty years after the film's completion and the furore that resulted in the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts imposing a worldwide ban on its public showing, Wiseman is in the middle of legal proceedings to get the restrictions lifted on the *cinéma vérité* documentary of life in Bridgewater State Hospital, a facility for the criminally insane. It isn't the first time Wiseman has gone to court over the film, but the time may finally be right for *Titicut Follies* to be shown. New scandals at Bridgewater last spring have resulted in court rulings ordering Massachusetts to make changes in long-time practices there. 'I think there's some hope, although how much I don't know, that the film will be sprung some time over the next few months,' Wiseman told me last December.

Wiseman's choice of phrase—'sprung', slang for being freed from jail—is revealing. Bridgewater is, for all essential purposes, a prison. It is run by the Massachusetts Department of Corrections, and at the facility civilly committed mentally ill patients, many of whom have no criminal record, are housed with the criminally insane. According to a report in the *Boston Globe* (18 September 1987), Massachusetts is the only state that still follows such a practice. Bridgewater is patrolled by Department of Correction guards and inmates wear prison blues. Of the scan-

dals that have periodically emerged from the hospital over the years, one of the most disturbing was the mid-60s findings of an investigative committee of the Massachusetts Bar and Massachusetts Medical Society that hundreds of inmates had been detained there illegally, some for years.

It is one of the many ironies surrounding *Titicut Follies* that the film has come to seem another of Bridgewater's detainees. Not that it has been suppressed illegally. Indeed, one of the most disturbing aspects of the affair is that what has been done to *Titicut Follies* has been done within the law, albeit with Wiseman arguing—and several judges in lawsuits against the film concurring—that it is fully protected by the First Amendment, which guarantees freedom of speech. But although the state has acted legally, and though it has always maintained that the actions it took were in the interest of protecting Bridgewater's inmates, the effect has been to eschew accountability, both to the inmates for the poor quality of care they receive, and to the public for what is occurring in an institution supported by their taxes.

These actions have also raised the spectre of the state censoring material that is potentially damaging to it, a practice many of us prefer to think can't happen in a democratic society. Massachusetts officials would probably deny that the film has been censored, citing its availability (according to the ruling of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts) to legislators, judges, lawyers, sociologists, social workers, doctors, psychiatrists, students in these

Frederick Wiseman.





# Film Shocks Legislators

## Wiseman Denies Rights Violated

### Beatniks Aided, Insane Aren't

### No Hidden Camera, Says Producer

# LLIES

CHARLES TAYLOR

or related fields, and organisations dealing with the social problems of custodial care and mental infirmity.

That ruling, however, is particularly ominous for a film-maker like Wiseman who, in documentaries such as *Hospital, Welfare, Law and Order, High School, Juvenile Court*, has dealt with the bedrock institutions of society and the way the individual interacts with them. His work has often aroused controversy, though none on the scale of *Titicut Follies*. Had the uproar interfered with the making of his other films? 'No,' Wiseman says. 'Outside of Massachusetts people felt, "Well, why shouldn't *Titicut Follies* be shown? What's wrong with these people?" The answer can be given in one word—politics. The *Titicut Follies* is a parade of ambitions, protective manoeuvres, grandstanding and misinformation that, were the First Amendment and the right of the mentally ill to humane and competent care not at issue, might be the stuff of satirical farce. But as it has played out over the last twenty years, the farce isn't funny, and the curtain has taken far too long to descend.

**B**efore Fred Wiseman came to be regarded as America's finest documentary film-maker, he was an attorney teaching at Boston University Law School. His subjects included legal medicine and psychiatry and the law, both of which emphasised criminal cases. It was during this time, the late 50s, that he first visited Bridgewater. 'I thought it would be more interesting, for the course as well as for me,' Wiseman

remembers, 'if I took my students on visits to places that, either as prosecutors they might be sending people, or as defence attorneys their clients might end up. So I took them to trials and parole board and probation hearings, and to mental hospitals and prisons. I still quite vividly remember the first time I went to Bridgewater.' What sticks in his mind? 'Lonely, isolated men, inadequate medical and psychiatric facilities. Buildings dating from around 1855, poorly heated and totally inadequate for that kind of care. But mainly isolated people without any contact with each other and desolate, wasted faces.'

In the years that followed, Wiseman began his first forays into professional film-making. In 1964, he produced Shirley Clarke's *The Cool World*, and when, a year later, he wanted to make a documentary, Bridgewater seemed a natural subject. In those years, the superintendent at the hospital was Charles Gaughan, whom Wiseman knew from his visits. Gaughan had been trying to persuade the state to allocate more funds to Bridgewater to upgrade the buildings as well as the quality of care. When Wiseman approached him with the idea of a film, the superintendent thought it might be just the thing to focus attention on conditions at the hospital and win the long-sought funds. He agreed to support Wiseman's application to the Commissioner of Corrections, John Gavin. Gavin considered the proposal for a while before rejecting it in fall 1965.

Wiseman was not giving up so easily. In January 1966, through a friend, State Representative Katherine Kane,

he was able to arrange an appointment with Elliot Richardson, then Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts. Wiseman remembers the meeting well. 'Richardson called Gavin in my presence and said he thought a movie about Bridgewater would be a good idea. About a week or ten days later, I got a letter from Gavin saying that I could make the movie on condition that I get an advisory opinion from the Attorney General saying it was ok.'

Wiseman wrote to Attorney General Edward Brooke, whose advisory opinion was that pictures could be taken of 'consenting' inmates. As Wiseman began shooting in spring 1966—29 days in all, over a three-month period—he had no idea that this question of consent was to be the linchpin of the state's allegations of invasion of inmates' privacy.

Wiseman explained to the *Civil Liberties Review* (Summer 1974) how he obtains consent from the subjects of his documentaries: 'I don't get written releases, but I do get consents. Either before the sequence is shot or just after, I explain to the participants that I'm making a film that's going to be shown on television and generally to the public, both nationally and in the community where the film is made. I ask whether they object to my using the sequence in the film. And I tape record the question and the answer... If they do object, I don't use the sequence. But the objection has to be registered at that time. In other words, I don't go back and look for people a year after the film is edited and ask permission then.'

In the letter first proposing the film to Gavin (August 1965), Wiseman outlined

# Invading Privacy of Hellhole Governor Kept from Preview Wiseman Denies Rights Violated

the approach he intended to use for *Titicut Follies*, and which he did use when filming began. 'No people would be photographed who do not have the competency to give a release,' the letter says. 'The question of competency would in all cases be determined by the superintendent and his staff and we would completely defer to their judgment.' Wiseman recalls, 'I was always accompanied by a guard. I assumed that the guard was acting as a representative of the superintendent.' He also points out that the fact of mental illness does not necessarily mean a subject is incompetent to give consent. 'In a narrow, legal way, the standard of competency varies. There's competency to drive a car, to be a witness, to make a will, and there's different language used to describe these various tests of competency.' As far as the inmates at Bridgewater were concerned, 'I wasn't making the determination as to who was competent, and they had to have presumed that some of the people there were competent, otherwise why would they have let me in in the first place?' Wiseman obtained nearly eighty written releases from patients and staff, some of whom do not appear in the finished film.

Wiseman spent a year editing the footage. 'I had several conversations with Gaughan, who asked how things were going. He never asked to see any of the footage, which I would have been glad to show him.' When the film was completed, in June 1967, Wiseman held a screening for Richardson and Gaughan. Richardson expressed admiration for the film, but he advised Wiseman not to show it to anyone in the state government. During legislative hearings on *Titicut Follies* in fall 1967, Wiseman testified that Richardson told him he 'should in no sense give the impression that [the state government] had control over the film.'

Meanwhile, the film had been accepted by the New York Film Festival. Reviews began to appear, praising the film and condemning Bridgewater. The real ruckus started when one review caught the attention of a woman named Mildred L. Methven, a former Massachusetts social worker living in Minnesota. What angered her was not that Wiseman captured footage of guards taunting and abusing inmates, or inmates held in primitive cells with only a bucket to serve as a toilet. No, what shocked Mrs Methven was that a film could be made in a Massachusetts

institution which showed naked men, and that's what she wrote in a letter to Governor John Volpe. It was the first he had heard of the film. Volpe summoned Richardson, who had just been elected Attorney General of Massachusetts in a close and bitterly fought campaign against Francis X. Bellotti. According to Wiseman, 'Richardson got scared. He felt that if his full participation in the movie came out, without his moving against it, his political career, which was then in the ascendancy, could be jeopardised.'

Richardson managed to get a temporary restraining order from a Superior Court judge, preventing the film from opening in Massachusetts. By that time, it had been shown at the New York Film Festival and had begun its commercial run there. Richardson twice tried to obtain similar restraining orders in New York, first in the state, then in the federal courts. On both occasions, the presiding judge refused, saying the film was protected by the First Amendment.

On 11 October 1967, Richardson called a press conference at which he charged Wiseman with 'flagrant violation of every assurance' he had given about protecting the rights of inmates. Richardson had reason to be on the defensive, since his role in helping Wiseman obtain permission had become public knowledge, and he was under attack from Massachusetts Democrats who saw a golden opportunity to get back at him for the election charge of 'moral insensitivity' he had levelled against Bellotti.

Many of the attacks on the film came from State Representative Robert L. Cawley, the Democratic vice-chairman of a legislative commission that convened hearings to determine how Wiseman got permission to make *Titicut Follies* in the first place. Cawley and other commission members made a series of headline-grabbing charges, none supported by evidence, the most outrageous of which was that Wiseman had used a hidden camera. Apparently *cinéma vérité* was too foreign a concept for Cawley to grasp, as was the reality of what most documentaries grossed at the box office. A recurrent note in the proceedings was the charge that Wiseman's reason for making the film was to earn some fast money with a *Mondo Cune*-style shockumentary. During Wiseman's appearance before the commission, Cawley repeatedly alluded to the money he had lost on *The Cool*

At no time in the 20 years since *Titicut Follies* was made has an inmate or relative testified or brought suit against the film.

World by calling him 'the producer of a flop'.

The movie's attackers (including Richardson, who said it 'callously exploited' its subject) assumed that its biggest selling point was the fact that the inmates are shown naked, as if the genitalia of the elderly and the insane were an irresistibly titillating prospect. As late as spring 1987, at a panel discussion held to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the banning, George Caner, one of the two Special Assistant Attorney Generals whom Richardson hired to present the state's case in court, reiterated this charge. 'He was repeating over and over again,' Wiseman says, 'that the point of my making the film was to show naked men for profit on Seventh Avenue.'

Reading newspaper accounts of the hearings, it seems clear that one of the commission's objectives was to garner publicity. And it found a willing ally in the *Boston Herald Traveler*, which covered the hearings with front-page headlines like 'FOLLIES "DOUBLE CROSS" CHARGED', 'HIDDEN CAMERA FILMED FOLLIES' and 'FILM SHOCKS LEGISLATORS'. The reporter assigned to the story, Peter Lucas, managed to work a reference to the film's depiction of 'inmates naked and in embarrassing situations, and also . . . inmates tell[ing] of abnormal sexual relations' (or some variation) into almost every piece. He also referred to Wiseman as 'a Cambridge attorney', which in the vocabulary of the *Herald* was derisive shorthand for 'liberal'. Meanwhile, on the editorial page, Thomas C. Gallagher, under headlines like 'BEATNIKS AIDED, INSANE AREN'T', decried the Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts for safeguarding the rights of draft card burners, but not taking any steps over Wiseman's 'glaring violations of the rights of mental patients at Bridgewater'.

Shortly before the trial got under way in November 1967, four Bridgewater guards filed suit against Wiseman in New York Federal Court, claiming that they had been libelled and defamed by the film. The judge threw out the case, once again citing the First Amendment.

Later that month, a non-jury trial began, presided over by Judge Harry Kalus. 'It was all in the hands of this judge,' Wiseman says, 'and it was clear that he hated me and hated the movie, from the first day. The moment the thing got started, I knew I was cooked.' Wiseman remembers Kalus' hostility with some amusement. At one point,

several enthusiastic reviews of *Titicut Follies* appeared in the national press and Kalus announced, in all seriousness, that the reviewers must be Wiseman's brothers-in-law. Ridiculous allegations were made against the movie—that one patient shown with his hand in his pocket was masturbating, that another with his hand upraised was intended as a parody of the Pope. But the state's case came down to three points:

- 1) The film constituted an invasion of privacy of a patient, Jim, whom we see being led naked from his cell, taunted and slapped by guards as he is taken to be shaved.
- 2) Wiseman breached an oral contract giving the Commissioner of Corrections and the superintendent of Bridgewater final approval over the film.
- 3) All receipts from the film should be held in a trust for the patients.

Since there were no receipts, the last charge was a moot point and was dismissed. But in December 1967, Kalus ruled that the film was an invasion of Jim's privacy and that Wiseman had breached an oral contract. He ordered the negative as well as all existing prints and outtakes destroyed.

No proof of an oral contract, however, has ever been found to exist, and Wiseman submits that it is 'impossible to contract away your First Amendment rights . . . You'd have to be an absolute fool to do that. I mean particularly to three such undistinguished "film-makers" as the Commissioner of Corrections, the superintendent and the Attorney General. You'd have to be totally out of your mind to give them, or anybody else, but particularly them, final cut.'

The invasion of privacy charge, the focus of the film's detractors, was even more absurd. Before the trial, no right of privacy existed in Massachusetts, either by statute or common law tradition. So Kalus' ruling in effect recognised the existence of a right of privacy in the state for the first time. Accordingly, the state legislature quickly drafted a right of privacy statute and passed it by the end of the session.

One of the ironies of the charge was that, as part of a policy of making the public more aware of life at Bridgewater, Superintendent Gaughan had begun to open the facility to visitors. 'In the year before the lawsuit, there were something like nine or ten thousand visitors,' Wiseman says. 'I have in the outtakes, for example, a group of high

school students who were being taken through Bridgewater by their football coach to show them the folly of a life of crime, and just by chance, one of the cells they looked into was Jim's. So he was obviously a star performer. I tried to get that introduced at the trial and the judge said it was irrelevant.'

Wiseman and his counsel asked the state to appoint an independent guardian who could determine whether or not the film was in the best interests of the inmates. 'My view all along is that the state only cooked up the privacy argument as a way of preventing the public from knowing what conditions are really like . . . The privacy that was really invaded was the privacy of the state officials to run the place in the way it was run. During the trial I used to get calls at three o'clock in the morning from a mother, cousin, sister, aunt, uncle of somebody who was in the film, saying they knew it was accurate. Some of them had even gone to New York to see it. They wanted me to know I had their support and they hoped the film would help their family member, but they were afraid to come forward for fear of reprisal against the relatives.' At no time in the twenty years since *Titicut Follies* was made has an inmate or relative testified or brought suit against the film. Least this sound like paranoia, the 1982 book *Screw: A Guard's View of Bridgewater* by Tom Ryan supports the fears of the inmates' relatives. The author, a psychology student who worked as a guard at the institution, records many incidents of guards beating patients who had written complaining about their treatment.

After Kalus' ruling, Wiseman began to prepare an appeal. In June 1969 the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts ruled that the film had merit but could only be shown to professionals in the fields of law, medicine and social services. In addition, Wiseman would be required to notify the courts and the Attorney General's office one week in advance of any screening, and immediately after each screening file an affidavit stating that the people who attended were within the class named in the ruling. In 1976, the Attorney General's office broadened this to allow individuals other than Wiseman to screen the film, if they followed the indicated procedure. Wiseman then took the battle to the United States Supreme Court. He twice petitioned them to hear the case; but lost both times by a vote of 4-3.

# 'Follies' Producer Blasts Richardson for Attack

Rep. Cawley Accuses Producer Wiseman:

## 'Hidden Camera Filmed Follies'

"Just a grade A exhibit of bad taste" —Sen. Cohen

Another lawsuit against Wiseman was filed in 1971 by Gavin and Gaughan, in their role as guardians of the inmates of Bridgewater, asking for invasion of privacy damages and \$1m in acting fees. The presiding judge ruled that the film was protected by the First Amendment.

**T**iticut Follies is by now legendary, but more people have heard of the controversy than have actually watched the film. If Wiseman is successful in his current bid, however, it will be widely seen for the first time since it was made. How, then, does a 20-year-old documentary stand up today? Its effect is still devastating. Were the film a muck-raking exposé, it might now seem merely a dated document. But Wiseman is beyond self-righteous anger or telling his audience what to think. The moral dimension he presents is far more complex, the conclusions he reaches far more unsettling. It is easy to be angered by the cowardice of Elliot Richardson and others in suppressing the film. It is far harder to point a finger at anyone we see in *Titicut Follies*.

'Titicut' is the Indian name for the area surrounding Bridgewater; 'Titicut Follies' is the name of the charity show put on by patients and guards that opens and closes the movie. A line of men stands on stage, dressed in clean white shirts, black bow ties and plumed marching band hats, singing 'Strike Up the Band'. The number goes smoothly, and the guard who acts as Master of Ceremonies—a jolly Joe who appears later at an inmate's birthday party and entertains the men with an impromptu song and dance—encourages the audience to show their appreciation. But already something seems amiss. The stage lights give a ghostly cast to the faces, faces that in close-up are drawn and hollow, proceeding through a joyless ritual. It is the longshot image, the image of the inmates as docile, obedient, obliging, that Bridgewater would like to present, but that image won't wash.

The show's cheery front is shattered with a cut to a group of new patients being admitted. Gathered in a large, bare room, they are commanded to strip by the guards, who repeatedly bark the order before the men have time to comprehend or respond. Disoriented and fearful, they stand there naked, not knowing what will happen next. It's

almost embarrassing to have to point out that their nakedness, so ballyhooed by the film's detractors in 1967, serves as a fitting metaphor for their emotional state: the unprotected quality of men stripped of their dignity, barely regarded as human beings.

The absence of dignity is visible in the conditions in which they live (a decrepit, dirty building with men isolated in dingy cells); in the care they're given (baths in tubs of filthy water); and most of all in the treatment they receive at the hands of the staff. The guards use their authority to taunt and abuse the men, as in Jim's case, but they are hardly the only guilty ones. Many of the doctors we see treat the men with their own brand of callousness. When one interviews a patient admitted for raping an eleven-year-old girl, an inquiry into his mental state suddenly turns into an attempt to shame him. 'Why do you do this when you have a good wife?' the doctor asks. 'She must not have been giving you much sex satisfaction.' When the doctor recounts the patient's recent suicide attempts, the man says helplessly, 'I need help. I don't know where I can get it.' We can only share his feeling of hopelessness when the doctor answers, 'You get it here, I guess.'

In another sequence, an emaciated old man who hasn't eaten in two days is led naked to a room where the same doctor informs him that he has a choice of eating voluntarily or being force-fed. When he doesn't respond, four guards hold him down by twisting towels round his wrists and ankles while the doctor inserts a tube into his nose and down his throat. The doctor then stands on a chair and pours liquid down a funnel connected to the tube, all the while holding a cigarette in his mouth, the ash getting precariously longer. In the middle of the sequence, Wiseman cuts to a shot of the man being shaved meticulously a few days later; it takes a while for us to realise that we are watching a corpse being prepared for burial. The body is laid out in a coffin, dressed in an ill-fitting suit; better cared for, one might think, in death than in life.

*Cinéma vérité* was still a fairly new concept when Fred Wiseman made *Titicut Follies*, and the term now calls up the undifferentiated vagueness of films where there is no guiding intelligence at work. *Titicut Follies* shows what the technique can accomplish in the hands of a discriminating sensibility.

I don't think  
Bridgewater is a  
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exist all over the  
world.

Wiseman may cut away from a scene, but he always returns to bring it to some sort of resolution, and what he cuts to usually makes what we have been watching resonate in some new way. He doesn't restrict us to one point of view—you may feel he has given you a chance to roam the corridors of Bridgewater and reach your own conclusions—but he shapes the material like a dramatist. The term *cinéma vérité* may have dated, but the film has not. I don't see how it could be any better made today.

What makes the deepest, most lasting impression is the texture which accumulates from the scenes of patients launching into incoherent harangues or staring blankly at the camera or even responding to it, like the old man who sings 'Chinatown, My Chinatown'. The graininess of the black and white captures the misery that hangs in the air and seems to emanate from the drab buildings. You emerge from the film in something like a state of low-level shock. Days later the atmosphere comes flooding back, and when it does what hits you are not the abuses Wiseman records, but the feeling of how dehumanised life is at Bridgewater, and how that dehumanisation is so familiar it has become banal. Even people who are doing their best to treat the inmates with some good humour and kindness, like the women who conduct an inmate's birthday party, can't prevail against the misery of the place.

In a few memorable scenes, we see the frustration of a young man who tries to buck Bridgewater. He was sent there from a state prison for a few days' observation, and the days have stretched into a year and a half. Now the young man wants to return to prison where, with the use of the library and other facilities available to him, he can prepare himself for life outside. He complains to a doctor that instead of therapy he is given drugs, but the doctor assures him that he is being cared for. If he were to return to prison, he is told, he'd be back at Bridgewater by nightfall.

The patient has been diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic and he is not without obvious problems—he believes that his food is being poisoned. But he is more lucid than any other patient we see, and no doctor chooses to answer his questions about how the aimless days at Bridgewater can take the place of the opportunities available in the prison he

was taken from. In the film's most painful sequence, we see him appear before a review board. When he asks why he is given drugs instead of help, he is asked, in return, why he doesn't take his medicine. As his frustration grows, he becomes less coherent, accusing one doctor of wanting to harm him. 'Well, that's interesting logic,' the doctor says with a tight smile before guards lead the young man away. It's a bad joke when the doctor prescribes a higher dosage of tranquilisers to 'get the paranoid element under control'. Watching this sequence, you don't wonder why the doctor didn't object to it being shown; he's certain that what he's doing is in the patient's best interest.

How many times have we reacted to a crazy person coming on to a crowded bus or subway car by ignoring him? How does that reaction increase when one is surrounded, as are the people at Bridgewater, by irrational, incoherent, potentially dangerous men? The doctors' condescension, like the taunts of the guards, is a form of the insulation we all avail ourselves of from time to time, except that in the case of the doctors it has become a part of their uniform. It's far easier, and surely more comfortable, to label the mentally ill as freaks or oddities or as something barely human, rather than to attempt to interact with them or acknowledge their humanity. The doctors' assertion of their professional status becomes another defence, another distancing technique at their disposal. The most upsetting thing about watching the film is that we cannot be sure that, in the same position, we would act differently.

**I**n the twenty years since Wiseman made *Titicut Follies*, a new facility has been built at Bridgewater, but conditions seem to have changed little. In spring 1987, the national press reported the deaths of five inmates. Three of the five deaths were suicides and were found to have been preventable. They occurred in seclusion cells where inmates are supposed to be constantly monitored by guards; the men were able to kill themselves because they had been left unobserved. In September 1987 Massachusetts Superior Court Judge James P. Lynch, Jr ruled that Bridgewater discontinue its practice of placing newly admitted patients naked in single cells equipped with holes in the floor for toilets, and that patients in

seclusion must be monitored by trained personnel visible to the patient at all times. Judge Lynch also ruled that seclusion cells should only be used in emergencies and that, despite repeated statements by Bridgewater officials, the admission of new patients did not constitute an emergency.

The outcry over the deaths prompted Wiseman once again to begin fighting on behalf of his film. 'There's some possibility that conditions wouldn't have been as bad as they are' if the film had been shown twenty years ago, 'and some changes might have taken place which might have prevented these deaths.' He adds, 'The attitude towards me might have changed somewhat. I have made a lot of other films in the interim and I'm not seen as a pornographic Cambridge lawyer. The *Follies* have been legitimised by time.'

Should *Titicut Follies* at last be allowed unrestricted showings, however, it would be another tragedy in the film's history if its continuing relevance were overlooked in a celebration of its release. Last September, for the first time since Wiseman made his documentary, a film crew was admitted to Bridgewater. Ron Allen, a reporter for *wcvb-tv* in Boston, was allowed into the facility, on condition that some inmates have their faces electronically altered to prevent identification. And what he found is all too familiar: strip searches of new patients conducted publicly, medication taking the place of therapy, buildings and staff inadequate to the patients' needs. The Massachusetts legislature recently recommended a fifty per cent increase in Bridgewater's annual budget, but many believe that isn't enough to equalise the current 12:1 patient-staff ratio.

One inmate Allen interviewed, who looks barely out of his teens, was admitted for killing his baby. The hospital is able to let him see his therapist only once a week, which the staff acknowledges is far from adequate. So the young man, who realises that the state can do nothing to help prevent him from hurting the people he loves, is taking his own steps. In the exercise yard, he stares into the sun, which is slowly burning away his retina, causing him to go blind, and he does not intend to stop there. 'One way or another, I'll find a way to take my life,' he vows. In 1967 Fred Wiseman said, 'I don't think Bridgewater is a unique institution. Places like it exist all over the world.' ■



# H I G H

Toronto. An hour after disembarking from a plane from Zurich, minutes after a leap through a hotel shower, Patricia Highsmith, 66, has slipped into slacks and loafers to meet the press. The author of *Strangers on a Train* and other suspense classics made into movies (Wim Wenders' *The American Friend*, from Ripley's *Game*, remains the best-known European adaptation) introduces herself guardedly.

'Call me Pat,' she says, shaking hands. She is determined to be cooperative, though burnt in the past by her rare interviews. 'I only know that it takes weeks to recover, as if one had been in a car accident,' she wrote in 1967. 'I think J. D. Salinger is correct in granting no interviews, and in making no speeches.' Twenty years later, Highsmith has agreed to take part in the Toronto International Festival of Authors, to read from her new novel *Found in the Street* and even to appear on a panel about books made over into films.

This is a coup for the eight-year-old Toronto festival. No one can recall when Highsmith last left Europe to venture into the public arena in America. Highsmith sighs at the repeated press descriptions of herself as a 'recluse'. 'It's because I prefer to live in the country where it's quiet.' Where exactly she won't say, though it is in a two-street town in the Italian part of Switzerland, three and a half hours from Zurich. 'Woody Allen movies dubbed into Italian,' she says.

Born in Fort Worth, Texas, Patricia Highsmith grew up in New York City. She took a degree at Barnard College. Then came years of travelling about Europe. Today she lives alone in Switzerland. 'I can't write if someone else is in the house, not even the cleaning woman. I like to work four or five hours a day. I aim for seven days a week. I have no television—I hate it. I listen to the BBC World Service starting at 2

in the morning until 4. I switch off the light and listen in bed. I don't set the alarm to get up. I get up when I feel like it.'

She owns no copies of films made from her books, not even Alfred Hitchcock's 1951 version of her first novel *Strangers on a Train* (1950). 'It seems to be entertaining after all these years,' she acknowledges. 'They keep playing it on American tv, ancient as it is. A few years ago, there were requests to me, "Can we make this?" I said that I have no rights. Contact the Hitchcock estate, which won't release it for a remake.'

*Strangers on a Train* was sold outright for \$7,500, with ten per cent of that to Highsmith's agent. A meagre recompense, some would say; but Highsmith disagrees. 'That wasn't a bad price then for a first book, and my agent upped it as much as possible. I was 27, and had nothing behind me. I was working like a fool to earn a living and pay for my apartment. I didn't hang around films. I don't know if I'd even seen Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes*.' Anyway, she heard that Robert Bloch was paid only \$9,000 by Hitchcock for his novel *Psycho*.

About *Strangers on a Train*: she adores Robert Walker as the psychopathic Bruno ('He was excellent. He had elegance and humour, and the proper fondness for his mother'). Highsmith is less pleased with Ruth Roman as Ann Morton, Guy's love interest ('She should be much warmer'). And she regrets Hitchcock's decision to turn Guy (Farley Granger), an architect in the novel, into a championship tennis player. 'I thought it was ludicrous. It's even more ludicrous that he's aspiring to be a politician, and that he's supposed to be in love with that stone angel.'

She only talked to Hitchcock once, while *Strangers on a Train* was in pre-production. 'I was in New York. He was in California. He rang me to make a report on his progress and said, "I'm

having trouble. I just sacked my second screenwriter.'" Hitchcock later hired Raymond Chandler to write the final script. Highsmith never met Chandler, or apparently any other writer of suspense novels. She doesn't read them, she says, except, over and over again, the master: Dostoevsky. Also Graham Greene, a declared Highsmith admirer, with whom she exchanges occasional letters. 'I have his telephone number, but I wouldn't dream of using it. I don't seek out writers because we all want to be alone.'

Highsmith has never seen *Once You Kiss a Stranger*, a 1969 Warner variation of *Strangers on a Train* in which a crazy girl (Carol Lynley) offers to assassinate the chief competition of a golf pro (Paul Burke) if he will bump off her psychiatrist. 'God knows, it was certainly done behind my back!' Highsmith laughs, *Strangers on a Golf Course*.

Highsmith claims she is 'not mad about' Claude Miller's 1977 *Dites-lui que je l'aime* from her novel *This Sweet Sickness*, and she loathes *Ediths Tagebuch*, the 1983 West German film by Hans Geissendörfer, drawn from *Edith's Diary*, one of her few novels with a female protagonist. In the book, Edith Howland, a suburban Pennsylvania housewife, suffers mightily because her homebound son, Clifflie, is so passive, unambitious and mediocre. In the movie, which is set in Germany, Clifflie becomes a psychotic who lusts after his mother (Angela Winkler). 'It's dreadful!' Highsmith says. 'Making the son in love with the mother is a lot of Oedipal crap.' She was taken aback because Geissendörfer's version of *The Glass Cell* (*Die Gläserne Zelle*, 1977) was a decent, sensitive film, a notable portrayal of the anguish of a man (Helmut Griem) who suspects that his wife (Brigitte Fossey) is enmeshed in a love affair.

Several of Highsmith's favourite versions of her works have been for television: a West German adaptation of



Left to right:  
Patricia Highsmith,  
*Strangers on a Train*;  
Robert Walker,  
*The Glass Cell*;  
Helmut Griem  
and Walter Kohut,  
*The American  
Friend*;  
Dennis Hopper  
and Bruno Ganz,  
*Plein Soleil*;  
Alain Delon.

# S M I T H

Gerald Peary

*Deep Water*, and a Quebec retelling of several short stories. She thinks *Le Meurtrier* (*Enough Rope*, 1963), from her novel *The Blunderer* (1954), is 'a jolly good film', and she is negotiating now to sell the rights for a remake. She must choose between competing bidders, an Italian producer and a French director, Claude Chabrol.

'Lately I ask for 4, 5, 6-page treatments from buyers of my books. I turn down plenty of them because they aren't inspired.' *Le Meurtrier*, directed by Claude Autant-Lars, moved Highsmith's New York setting to Southern France. 'I hope this time it will be set in California,' she says. A character in *The Blunderer* is a sadistic New Jersey policeman who commutes into New York and beats up murder suspects as part of his investigation. 'In a way, I made a mistake,' Highsmith admits, 'because a New Jersey policeman can't operate that way in New York. But in California, he can move between different counties.'

In 1952, under the nom de plume Claire Morgan, Highsmith published *The Price of Salt*, a novel of lesbian love, notably radical in its day for having a happy ending. The heroine, Therese, rejects her boyfriend (who is given to quoting from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*) for a passionate new life in the arms of sophisticated Carol. This was Highsmith's only overtly gay novel before her new book *Found in the Street*, which is set in the casually bisexual New York art world. Critics, however, have noted the homosexual underpinnings of Highsmith's many tales of unlikely male friendship, particularly the four Ripley novels.

Tom Ripley is constantly mistaken for being 'queer'. He likes to attend all-male parties and to masquerade in other men's clothes, particularly the garments of those who obsess him. In *The Talented Mr Ripley* he develops an

undeniable crush on Dickie Greenleaf. When Greenleaf spurns him, Ripley kills the young man. By the fourth novel, *The Boy Who Followed Ripley*, her hero has committed eight murders (by Highsmith's count) and got away with all of them.

'I don't think Ripley is gay,' Highsmith says adamantly in Toronto. 'He appreciates good looks in other men, that's true. But he's married in later books. I'm not saying he's very strong in the sex department, but he makes it in bed with his wife.' In *The American Friend*, his idiosyncratic reading of Ripley's *Game*, Wim Wenders made Ripley (Dennis Hopper) into a bachelor once again. 'Ripley has some nice friends though,' Wenders told an interviewer. 'He's not a solitary and he's not a homosexual. Not explicitly. But the way he handles Jonathan has a lot to do with homosexuality.' When these comments are quoted to her, Highsmith counters, 'Ripley is married. And he's not lost. He has his feet on the ground.' As for Wenders, Highsmith says, 'He mingled two Ripley books for *The American Friend*—one of them, he didn't buy.' (Wenders' frame story concerns forged paintings, a plot fragment borrowed from *Ripley Under Ground*.)

Highsmith met Wenders before *The American Friend*, when he tried to buy the film rights of one of her books. According to Wenders, the novels he was interested in, *Cry of the Owl* and *The Tremor of Forgery*, were already optioned. Highsmith suggested he read the one she had just finished writing. It was *Ripley's Game*, and I liked it from the beginning.' And Highsmith liked Wenders. 'There's something about him that's ok. His artistic quality, his enthusiasm.' *The American Friend*, she concedes, has a certain 'stylishness', and she thinks the scenes on the train are terrific. Also, she likes *Paris, Texas*. But she is confused by Dennis Hopper's

highway cowboy rendition of Ripley. 'Those aren't my words,' she says of his philosophical soliloquies.

Highsmith thinks that the handsome Alain Delon was excellent as Ripley in *Plein Soleil* (*Purple Noon*, 1959), René Clément's adaptation of *The Talented Mr Ripley*, though she was jolted by the ending in which Ripley is caught after throwing the murdered Dickie Greenleaf overboard. But perhaps, she says, *Strangers on a Train's* Robert Walker might have been the best Ripley of all, if he had lived.

Alas, Highsmith has become bored in Toronto talking about the movie versions of her novels. Finally, she says, film directors can do what they want with her books, once she has signed the contract. Especially since she isn't interested in doing the screenplays herself. 'I started screenplays two or three times, and I can assure you that I failed. I don't think in the way a playwright thinks. So, if people have bought something of mine, they know by now that I will decline writing it for the movies. Anyway, I don't want to know movie directors. I don't want to be close to them. I don't want to interfere with their work. I don't want them to interfere with mine.'

She rarely sees movies. When she does, it is usually to catch up, such as on a jaunt to the Locarno festival. A decade ago, Highsmith was president of the jury at the Berlin festival. 'I was not particularly good at it,' she remembers. 'I hated cracking the whip, and these juries turn into political things. Some fellow from the Third World kept hammering for prizes for a Communist film which was rotten.'

An embarrassingly obvious final question. Does Highsmith have a favourite movie of all time? 'No.' Not *Citizen Kane* or *Casablanca*? 'No, no,' she says again, but then she smiles to herself. 'Maybe *Gone With the Wind*—and it's a great book as well.' ■

In 1987, two films—both drawn from classic literary texts, and both having taken many years to set up—won particular affection from critics and audiences wherever they were shown: *Babette's Feast*, from a story by Isak Dinesen, and *Little Dorrit*, from the Dickens novel. In Paris,

Jill Forbes sought out Gabriel Axel, the Danish director of *Babette's Feast*; and in London, Guy Phelps travelled to a Rotherhithe warehouse to meet Richard Goodwin and Christine Edzard, the husband and wife team who produced and directed *Little Dorrit*.



*Babette's Feast*: Enjoying their meal.

# Axel's Feast

JILL FORBES: Is *Babette's Feast* a project you have nursed for a long time?

GABRIEL AXEL: Fourteen years. I first suggested it to French television and they said Yes straight away. But the Danes said No, and I couldn't find a producer. Then two or three years ago I went to the Danish Film Institute, which exists to encourage independent productions, secured their agreement, I found a French producer which enabled us to get the *avance sur recettes* from the CNC and the *FR3* came in with 1½ million francs. Then I couldn't find a distributor, gave the whole thing up, went back to Denmark, found a Danish producer, persuaded the Danish Film Institute to increase their participation and so it became an entirely Danish production.

—Facilitated by the success of Blixen/*Out of Africa*?

—Not at all. We got the agreement in July 1985 and *Out of Africa* was not shown until 1986. But of course it

helped with the sales subsequently.

—What about Stéphane Audran? She agreed to do it even though there was no French sale. Why did you want her for the part?

—She is Parisian, feminine, a star, an angel of the house. . . . And the right age. She somehow belongs to the same tradition of acting as the Danes in the film.

## Jill Forbes

It's important that all the actors should, so to speak, be playing in the same key.

—I would have said there was a remarkable dissimilarity. . . .

—Yes, of course. She's French. She walks like a Frenchwoman, closes a door like a Frenchwoman. Everything she does is gracious, whereas the Danish women are wearing clogs.

—But they're beautiful.

—Yes, but they move like Danes. It's not a criticism. It's a fact.

J.F.: Tell me something about the religious backdrop of the story. Is it important?

G.A.: I was asked recently if I was a believer, if I thought the Church has a role. All I can say is that in *Babette's Feast* there's a minister, but it's not a film about religion. There's a general, but it's not a film about the army. There's a cook, but it's not a film about cooking. It's a fairy tale, and if you try to over-explain it, you destroy it. If you wish, it's a film about the vagaries of fate and a film about art because Babette is an artist. She creates the greatest masterpiece of her life and gives it to the two old maids. The moment you start to dissect the film it becomes symbolic, and I resist that. It's the love of her work and her knowledge of it which affects people.



—I thought I detected a certain nostalgia for France in the film?

—Perhaps, yes. My father lived in France. I was born in Denmark but when I was two months old I came to France and I went to school in France, so French is almost my first language. Even so, I've never felt very French since I was brought up in a Danish household. But in a film studio, I feel more at home in Paris than in Copenhagen. It may be that I was drawn to the story because it's about an activity that seems typically French. Nevertheless, Karen Blixen makes some mistakes. For example, she refers to *Veuve Clicquot 1860*. Now the story takes place in 1885 and champagne doesn't keep that long. After eight years it begins to deteriorate.

—What about the *cailles en sarcophage*?

—Bocuse knows the recipe. In fact, he cooked it recently to celebrate two years of political co-habitation between Jacques Chirac and François Mitterrand.

—I take it you're interested in food?

—Oh yes. I'm a gourmet. This year, because of the film, I've been to a few good restaurants, and this led me to realise in the end how simple Babette's meal is.

—It seemed pretty expensive. How much did she win in today's terms?

—200,000 francs. £20,000. Between twelve people. And don't forget she bought the silver and the dinner service and the linen as well. Any great chef will tell you that 50 per cent of a meal is the presentation.

—So the meal is an end in itself?

—Not at all. The young Lieutenant was unable to explain why he was leaving. After the meal, we repeat the exact same shot but this time the General finds the words he ought to have said when he was young: 'Every day that remains in my life I shall be with you.' And he realises that he has wasted his life. So it's Babette's meal and her art which liberates their minds and gives them all the strength to be themselves. It's a film about right and wrong choices in life too.

—It's a rather cruel portrait of Denmark, isn't it?

—Karen Blixen says that spirituality and sensuality go together. But the Danes don't like this. The film hasn't received a single award in Denmark. No one is a prophet in his own country.

J.F.: Could we talk a little about your earlier career.

G.A.: The only film of mine that ever made any money before *Babette* was *Danish Blue*, which was not a pornographic film but a film about pornography as a result of which censorship was abolished in Denmark. But for ten years I mainly worked for French television. I directed adaptations of Balzac's *Le Curé de Tours*, Simenon's *Antoine et Julie*, Tournier's *Le Coq de Bruyère*, Maeterlinck's *Les Colonnes du Ciel* and Pierre Moustier's *Un Crime de Notre Temps*.

—How do you find the difference between television and films?

—In tv you have to work very quickly. All these projects represented a year's preparation, a month's shoot and a year's post-production. Whereas for *Babette*, for about the same length of footage, the shoot was 54 days. On the other hand, most of my tv work was on 16mm and the two that were done on video were with a single camera, not four as in a tv studio. I've also worked a lot for Danish television, mainly adaptations of plays—Molière, Giraudoux, Salacrou, Musset, people like that, usually French.

—And your present projects?

—I wish to concentrate now on things I really want to do and on feature films. My next project is the real story of Hamlet as told by Saxo Grammaticus—with a happy ending, very different from Shakespeare, and if the Danes won't do it I'm sure I can raise the money in England. It's a story about peasants. When Hamlet returns from England, where he was supposed to have been killed, you see him come back to the court, which is far from the splendid romantic castles we usually get, but one of those low-built Viking houses, full of smoke. In those days a King was someone with fifty soldiers and ten horses. But there are similarities with *Babette*. It's a fairy tale in exactly the same way.

—I detect a theatrical tradition in your career?

—I began life as an actor. I went to the Royal Danish Theatre School and I produced about fifteen plays in Denmark. Often adaptations of French theatre. Denmark, after all, hasn't got a modern theatrical tradition and it's too influenced by Strindberg and Ibsen. This has an influence on the actors. When you direct Audran she understands immediately what you want, but you have to explain the psychology in great detail to a Dane. All Stéphane

Audran said to me was, 'Tell me what state I'm in.' Obviously, you have to find the precise description. For example, when she's in the procession, she said, 'Am I happy?' 'No.' 'Am I proud?' 'No.' 'So what am I?' 'Serene.' And with that single direction, she played the whole scene.

—For me there's a huge difference between the poetry of *Babette* and the formalism of the French theatre.

—I have the advantage of having an ironic view of both France and Denmark. I'm a northerner, but I also understand the French. In addition, I admire the discipline of the French on a film set. When we started shooting *Babette*, I wrote seven pages about the film and distributed it to the whole crew. Not one single Dane asked me a question and I later discovered that none of them had any faith in the film. And Stéphane Audran was astonished by the lack of professionalism among her Danish colleagues, who kept on leaving the set on some pretext or other.

J.F.: Let me ask the question I'm sure everyone asks. Are you a disciple of Dreyer? Some scenes in *Babette's Feast* might recall *Ordet*, for example.

G.A.: I admire Dreyer for his sense of composition and his rigour. But my real master is Louis Jouvet, whom I admire as a man of the theatre, for his simplicity and total refinement. I worked for four years as a spear-carrier in Jouvet's company in Paris. I find a similar quality in certain painters, such as Braque or Vermeer. Nothing extraneous, only the essential. In a film, what I look for is the actor's face. Nothing should detract from the actor's eyes, in which everything can be read, whether in long-shot or in close-up. In *Babette* there's hardly a story. It's just a series of portraits. And that's my ultimate aim. □

*Babette's Feast*: The General (Jarl Kullé) and his love (Birgitte Federspiel).



DINESEN/AXEL  
DICKENS/EDZARD



Little Dorrit: Patricia Hayes (Affrey).

# Victorian Values

## 1. Poverty

The vitality and character of London's East End has always derived from the successive waves of immigrants washed up in an area ideally placed to service the needs of the affluent West End. But this unique conjunction of diverse communities was also home to unimaginable degradation and vice. 'Like an enormous, black, motionless, giant kracken, the poverty of London lies there in lurking silence and encircles with its mighty tentacles the life and wealth of the City and of the West End,' reported a journalist in 1891. Even as he wrote, however, it was the City that was reaching eastwards, gobbling up the poorer areas and forcing the artisans and labourers down-river. What nineteenth-century capitalism had begun, Hitler's bombs and the new Docklands development schemes have

finished, transforming whole landscapes and, with unbiased indifference, destroying joy and misery alike.

Pockets of the past of course remain. One such surrounds the ancient Mayflower Inn, the site from which the Pilgrim Fathers set sail. A few yards down Rotherhithe Street is the Pump Engine House for Marc Brunel's Thames Tunnel of 1825-43. In between,

## Guy Phelps

linked by an old iron bridge, are two warehouses dating from around 1740 which form the 'modern' home of Sands Films, a remarkable family business which unites traditional skills and 'out-moded' working practices with the organisation of a quintessentially twentieth century art form.

It is now already a cliché to note that,

in comparison with Hollywood, Moscow or Bombay, Britain has only a cottage film industry. In the case of Sands this term is perfectly apposite, for over the last dozen years its owners, Richard Goodwin and Christine Edzard, have built up a small-scale, fully integrated film-making operation based on a blueprint more familiar from the silent cinema, or modern theatre practice. Those two buildings house a complete film studio—a large sound stage, workshops for carpentry, metalwork, plastering, painting, model-making, printing and costume production, editing suites for sound and picture, cameras acquired from the old MCM studios at Borehamwood, projection suite, canteen and even the Rotherhithe Picture Research Library, a reference collection run as an Educational Trust as well as a superb research resource. This complex is metaphorical home to a staff of 25 permanent employees and literal home for the couple who brought it all to fruition.

Neither Goodwin nor Edzard, begetters of this positively Victorian arrangement, can be described as locals. Christine Edzard was born in Paris in 1945. Her parents, one German, the other Polish, were both painters. Though they insisted that she acquire a degree in Economics, she soon gravitated towards the theatre, becoming assistant to designers Lila di Nobili and Rostislav Doboujinsky, working on both operas and plays. It was di Nobili who, in 1966, persuaded her to go to Rome to work on Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet*. The film's associate producer was Richard Goodwin, already a film veteran at 32 having been location manager for Lord Brabourne on a film the latter had been producing in Bombay (where Goodwin had been born and brought up) nine years earlier.

Goodwin and Edzard married and soon settled in Britain. It was the period of Bryan Forbes' ill-fated tenure as head of production at EMI Elstree. One of his successful projects was the ballet film *Tales of Beatrix Potter* which Goodwin produced. Edzard not only spent two years designing sets and costumes but also wrote the script.

If *Beatrix Potter* proved to be popular, its success paled in comparison with that of the next production from the team of Goodwin and Brabourne, *Murder on the Orient Express*, the first in the series of very commercial films based on Agatha Christie's novels. The profits from this film enabled the Goodwins to realise their dream, and one sunny Sunday in 1975 their search for a base led them to Rotherhithe. Converted at considerable expense, the dilapidated warehouses allowed the couple to move in their existing toy and doll's-house making business (an offshoot of set design) and gradually to add other skills and crafts, all of which were to be integrated into the grand final design—a film studio.

From the start it was conceived that Edzard was to direct, and she immediately threw herself into a series of films that were both labours of love and learning experiences. Three short Andersen tales were eventually put together as *Stories from a Flying Trunk* and included techniques as varied as stop-frame animation, live action and ballet. An animated short, *The Nightingale*, took four years to make and was followed by Edzard's first real breakthrough, *Biddy* (1983), a beautifully realised story of an English nanny ('a tiny gem of a film'—*Stills*). Made for \$350,000 put up by the film-makers themselves, *Biddy* is only now getting near to covering its costs, but it gave Edzard the confidence to pursue the realisation of a much more ambitious project, the Dickens masterpiece *Little Dorrit*, always assumed to be too big a novel ever to be adaptable to film—the four early versions made between 1913 and 1934 attempted only tiny sections of the story.

'In my new book I have been blowing off a little steam... but I have no political faith or hope,' Dickens had

written to a friend in 1855. A fulmination against the cankers at the heart of a Britain then at the height of her industrial hegemony, *Little Dorrit* had its origins in the author's personal experience. His father had been consigned to the Marshalsea debtors' prison thirty years before, a calamity that left a lasting impression on the young son. The novel tells of old William Dorrit, incarcerated there for fifteen years, of his stunted daughter Amy who was born there, and of the outsider Arthur Clennam who helps to secure the release of William, finally marries Amy, but also spends time in the Marshalsea himself. The main theme of the book is the destructive power of Money and its reckless pursuit, exemplified in the stock market collapse which ruins many of the characters. Criticism is also directed at religion, at the law, at blind bureaucracy and at the pervasive refusal to accept responsibility: the working title of the book was 'Nobody's Fault'.

Christine Edzard saw in *Little Dorrit* not a brilliant period piece but a work that is 'terribly close, in hundreds of ways, to today.' Dickens wrote at a time of growing public dissatisfaction with government, a time of riots and high unemployment, when the rich were growing richer, the poor ever poorer. It was a time of greed and speculation, epitomised by that Boesky of former days, John Sadleir, the great banker and financier whose empire crashed bringing disaster for thousands and suicide to the once 'shining wonder'. Dickens warned of the 'enormous black cloud of poverty in every town' and attacked with all the venom of a former Commons reporter the ineffectiveness of Parliament and the 'insolence' of the Prime Minister. His own ability to draw attention to these ills was, he felt, limited by the cloak of 'horrid respectability' that was suffocating the arts in this country.

Undaunted by any fear of such impotence and despite Richard Goodwin's heavy involvement co-producing *A Passage to India*, the Sands Films team turned to the new project. The toy-making, which had kept some cash flowing to weigh against the £2,500 per week overheads, was put aside and the skills applied to their real purpose—film-making. Doll's houses were replaced by miniature sets for slide superimposition. All hands turned to making hundreds of costumes (there were to be 250 speaking parts alone), to constructing models and to designing sets for what Edzard and her assistant, Olivier Stockman, soon saw would have to be two separate films: not simply due to length, but to enable the unravelling narrative to be seen from two different points of view. Thus Part One is seen through the experiences of Clennam, Part Two through Amy Dorrit herself.

The idea for this approach came very early on. 'We broke the book down and we thought of several points of view, but we came back quickly to two because it is a very satisfying structure, and it is suggested in the book. What I

wanted to show is that there are different perceptions of the same reality, and that Dickens' great quality is to see the characters from two angles—in William both the absurd, the fragile, the vulnerable and also the pathetic and lovable.' It was also soon apparent that both films would be long, though quite how long nobody could be sure. If early reports mentioned four or four and a half hours (rather than the eventual six) it was 'because we didn't want to frighten people too much.'

Back from India, and bringing with him cotton for use in the costumes, producer Goodwin was having less luck with his side of the business, locating someone to bankroll the dream. 'The problem was less finding the money than finding someone who believed that the project was workable at the length it is.' None of the usual sources either here or in America, where Goodwin tried unsuccessfully to create interest in a co-production deal, met any more positive response than had greeted Dickens' Mr Doyce in his efforts to finance his unbelted transmission system. But, unlike Doyce who failed to persevere (and is the only person in *Little Dorrit* to accept blame), Goodwin pressed on, despite mounting costs. 'We had determined to make the film before we had any backers and to get as far down the line as possible. We ended up taking a complete flyer and mortgaging the studio.' By the end of 1984 bankruptcy, if not the Marshalsea, beckoned.

## 2. Riches

Salvation came in the form of Gary Dartnall, head of Thorn EMI Screen Entertainment, who visited Rotherhithe and agreed to fund the whole project—'extremely brave of him in the circumstances'. In fact *RESE* was in crisis itself, with parent company Thorn nervously assessing its brief flirtation with the unpredictable world of show business. Dartnall, about to mount his own attempt at a management take-over, needed to have irons in the fire to give the impression of a busy unit. At £5m, *Little Dorrit* was not a giant gamble.

In November 1985 shooting started in Rotherhithe—and *RESE* was put on the market. Gary Dartnall's take-over foundered and the company was eventually swallowed up by Cannon, the last of its great meals. By this time, April 1986, the film was in mid-shoot, leaving Cannon too committed to withdraw. 'In fact they were very decent. They left us completely alone to finish. They were pretty puzzled by it...'

Apart from film processing, every single stage of film-making was completed in-house at Grice's Wharf. Everyone contributed skills that only Edzard knew they had. An accountant found his forte in stitching waistcoats, Edzard herself made some of the jewellery, her old mentor Doboujinsky came over from Paris to work on the garden sets, Stockman not only helped edit the film but

constructed 93 top-hats and devised a variation of the Schufftan process to create the illusion of city streets. In this atmosphere Edzard felt no qualms about taking on screenwriting, directing and editing, because they felt not like different roles, but part of the same operation. 'It was possible because the people I work with are so close and I know that they will be with me, not introducing different thinking. Making the film was a great joy and very civilised. I enjoyed everything about it.'

*Little Dorrit* took nine months to shoot, preceded by a year of casting (with Alec Guinness, Joan Greenwood, Cyril Cusack, Robert Morley, Max Wall, Derek Jacobi and Alan Bennett among the players), and a year of post-production. Until the pictures were almost finished there was no guarantee that they would ever be shown. Only when Curzon were presented with almost complete prints was a British distribution deal finalised, and even then nobody anticipated the chorus of approval that was to greet the films. 'I thought the films would work but I was surprised they worked so well, with good reviews not just from one kind of publication but from all—from the tabloids to the punk magazines and the specialist press.'

In December 1987, shortly after the collapse of stock markets around the world, *Little Dorrit* opened in London to

packed and appreciative audiences. Goodwin and Edzard are currently co-ordinating distribution in the provinces, where audiences for anything remotely unusual are much harder to generate. The director's experiences talking to filmgoers around the country have emphasised one fascinating feature. It appears that almost every viewer has a clear favourite between the two parts, depending on their reaction to the two key figures. 'Some people have more affinity with Arthur and others with the character of Little Dorrit and that makes them prefer one part to the other, rather than anything in the structure. Very few people can make the leap and identify with both.'

In fact the paired structure of the films, telling the same story through different sets of eyes, allowed Edzard to match an important aspect of the book—the way in which we are able to meet the characters in one context and then not just leave them there but come back, meet them again and find out more from a different aspect. Or, as Dickens put it in another letter, to have characters 'coming together, in a chance way, as fellow-travellers . . . and to connect them afterwards, to make the waiting for that connection a part of the interest.'

Nor is the attention to detail in the film merely a personal obsession. 'What we wanted to do was to make Dickens

come across as real, as a journalist's piece. That feeling that it is all about what you might bump into in the street—hence the detail, not for its own sake, but for the sake of reality and to give coherence. Incoherence is unreal. What makes a thing real is making it believable and making it coherent. As soon as something jars, the audience jumps because it is different.'

While Edzard and Goodwin nurse *Little Dorrit* through distribution and exhibition (foreign deals are yet to be done), the stages at Rotherhithe spring to the movements of dancers and reverberate to the mixed demands of commercials makers to whom they are hired. Edzard is working on another project—and Stockman also has an idea—but no details are forthcoming, beyond sight of a number of small 'marble' columns. Whatever the nature of these plans, they will undoubtedly conform to Goodwin's golden rule of promising 'a long-term earning life, combined with sensible pricing and budgeting.' The Sands approach will continue to apply, where the 'family' of workers contribute their talents, where nothing is wasted or thrown away, where clippings from the carpentry shop help to warm the laundry, where dressing cubicles will be cabins salvaged from *Death On The Nile*. Whatever the success of *Little Dorrit*, nobody will have gone off to Hollywood. ■

*Little Dorrit*: Eleanor Bron (Mrs Merdle) and Alec Guinness (William Dorrit).



# PARIS PARIS

JILL FORBES

Paris, New York, Tokyo, Rome, Berlin... What is the special nature of the relationship between the city and the cinema, the art which more than any other was born of urbanisation? It seems that Paris and New York have something that London, Vienna, San Francisco and even New Orleans do not, namely a cinematic image, atmosphere or configuration. This may have depended historically on the location of the first film studios which, at least in England, tended to be eccentrically sited, reflecting, in this, the national passion for suburbia. But the thesis of the organisers of 'Cités-Cinés' is that a more significant reason is the necessary and intimate relation between architecture and the cinema.

The Cités-Cinés exhibition is an adventure playground for film lovers, a dream that has come true via papier-mâché. It has been built—that is the word—at La Villette, a complex of concert halls and exhibition spaces created from the former city abattoirs: a desolate zone on the northern edge of Paris where the streets are still paved with cyclopean cobblestones designed to withstand pounding hoofs and the cafés still cater to the meat trade.

Inside this enormous shed an entirely fake city has been constructed, complete with main street, phone booths, concierge's lodges, bars, diners, car parks and underground stations—the kind of locations which attract film-makers the world over. And off the main drag are sited twenty-one screens showing montage sequences each grouped round a different theme. Some are devoted to cities such as Paris or New York which have a particularly rich cinematic iconography; others, such as 'the car park' or 'the outskirts', are those which have attracted a certain film-making tradition. Thus in 'Périphéries' (the outskirts) the visitor presses his nose against a wire fence enclosing a patch of waste ground over which are strewn old tv sets, car parts, tyres, the debris of

the consumer society, and across which, at the appropriate height, runs a rusting railway bridge. On to the screen, which is cunningly suspended just under the bridge, is projected a clip from Kurosawa's film in which the dwarf stumbles through just such a waste plot holding out his hands and intoning 'Dodes'ka-den, dodes'ka-den...'

The 'Café Lumière', on the other hand, is done out with wood panelling and a pool table in keeping with an altogether more light-hearted approach, with Chaplin as a virtuous waiter in a scene from *City Lights* and Griffin Dunne ordering a deadly cocktail and making the waiter drink it in an extract from *After Hours*. Probably the most imaginative sequence is 'Subway', where the set was built by the Paris Métro which it resembles. When the film loop is about to roll the signal changes from red to green, the earth shakes and the soundtrack rumbles. Then we see Besson's *Subway*, the ventilator grating sequence from *Seven Year Itch* (which is cheating a bit), but also clips from *Bande à part*, *While the City Sleeps* and, most interesting of all, Daniela's *Walking Through Moscow*, which is a kind of Soviet *Singin' in the Rain*.

However, the city of cities, the mecca of this entirely factitious world, is Cinecittà, film city itself, which merits a cinema of its own and a montage that lasts a good twenty minutes. Is this Rome or merely this image of it? The question of authenticity was posed all those years ago by Marcello Mastroianni in *La Dolce Vita*, reprised here in the famous sequence in which Anita Ekberg disports herself in the fountain. In fact, with *Roma*, *City of Women* and, most recently (though not in the exhibition) *Intervista*, it runs through most of Fellini's work, and his effortless meditations on illusion and reality can make even Visconti look like a poor relation. When in *Rocco and His Brothers* Annie

Girardot and Alain Delon play their farewell scene on the towers of Milan Cathedral, or when the crowd gazes up in wonder towards those same towers in De Sica's *Miracle in Milan*, the viewer suddenly comprehends the limitless possibilities of the studio set and the poverty of the real.

For the cityscape is also the future, and this is where architect and filmmaker come together. Cités-Cinés has identified two strands in the urban imagination. On the one hand, the geometric austerity of the modern movement, symbolised by the hero (Frank Lloyd Wright?) of King Vidor's *The Fountainhead*, filmed in profile by his office window against a scale model of his next office block which, because of the flattening of perspective, is virtually indistinguishable from the real blocks outside the window. This inhuman and menacing city is the *Alphaville* tradition. On the other hand, there are the expressionist excesses of *Metropolis*, *Brazil* or *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, whose Babylonian towers and criss-cross walkways intimidate by their complexity rather than their size. In either case man and the city are incommensurate, but in the former it is physically, in the latter intellectually.

If it is in model-making that the architect resembles the set designer, it is in myth-making that the set designer becomes an architect of the imagination, mobilising a capacity to figure a potential reality. This is why Trauner's Paris, for example, is more real than the real thing. So that Cités-Cinés is a looking-glass world, an invitation to pass through a vast screen made of fibreglass strips on to which are projected clips from *Man with a Movie Camera* and *Metropolis*, and into a world of winking video screens, camera eyes and chiaroscuro. This must be the first ever exhibition that can be lived in.

Alas, Cités-Cinés also encourages a meditation on Paris as a film city. While perhaps not a world centre for production, it has, until very recently, been a mecca for film exhibition. It always used to be possible to see everything in Paris sooner or later, but how times change! In the past, the serious film viewer would rush out on Wednesday and tick off the week's viewing in *Pariscope*; these days it's more likely to be in *Télérama*. For with six tv channels, each of which shows at least one film a day and often more, the choice on television is greater than any one individual can cope with. And much of it is worth seeing. So the last year, since the two new tv channels really got going, has seen a spectacular drop in cinema attendances for the first time for nine



Subway.

Photographic  
François-Xavier  
Bouchart.

# CITÉS. CINÉS

an adventure playground for film lovers



This inhuman and  
menacing city.



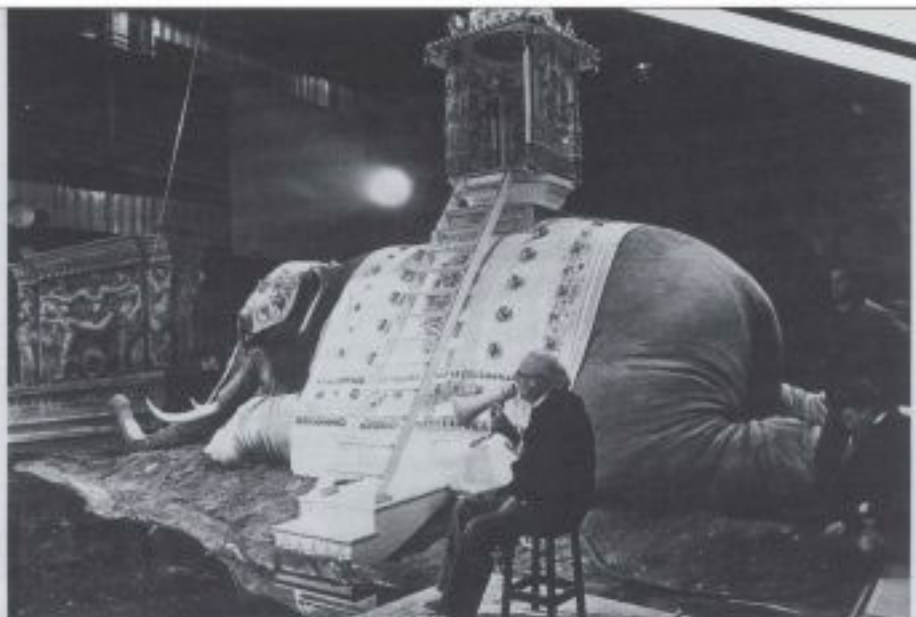
An invitation to pass  
through a vast screen  
made of fibreglass strips.



years, bringing France into line, more or less, with other European countries. The drop has been so sudden that any attempt on the part of the TV companies to attribute it to longer term social factors would not seem remotely plausible. Television does not kill the cinema, of course, since it is heavily implicated in film production, but it has an indisputably deleterious effect on exhibition.

There is worse. At the beginning of January the Ministry of Culture hosted a meeting between the film industry and the television channels in an effort to stop the rot. But Canal Plus refused to take part, while the recently privatised TV1 took the opportunity to attempt to hobble its public-service competitors. It seems that the film industry will have to learn to live with this new situation. Where French television is particularly culpable, however, is not so much in the number of feature films shown as in the quantities of American products. The transatlantic predominance is astounding: a typical week will include 70 American productions (series, telefilms, etc) as against 20 French, 7 British and about 3 from other sources, and again this explosion of American product is entirely attributable to the creation of new channels. Everyone said that it would happen—and it has.

Television's capacity to cannibalise the cinema is already familiar in Italy and



Intervista: Federico Fellini.

is shortly to become so in Britain, while in France it forms the backdrop to Federico Fellini's recent court case. It seems that the French distributors of *Intervista*, Fellini's latest film, disliked the subtitles used for the Cannes screening, though they were by a well-known Italian specialist, and commissioned different titles which infuriated Fellini. *Traduttore traditore!* But the film-maker, who in his original contract with his producer had a right to veto all titles, found that these rights had been sold on several times, making it impossible to find a culprit.

The film itself takes on a special poignancy as a result, for it is a *mise en scène* of the film-maker at work, confronting the world of Cinecittà today not with the real world so much as with Cinecittà as it used to be. Cités-Cinés guessed correctly, for here, in *Intervista*, the ageing Mastroianni visits the ageing Ekberg, at Fellini's instigation, and together they wave a magic wand which allows them to review the fountain scene from *La Dolce Vita* and all their yesterdays. Simone Signoret got it right: Nostalgia ain't what it used to be and neither is the cinema in Paris. ■

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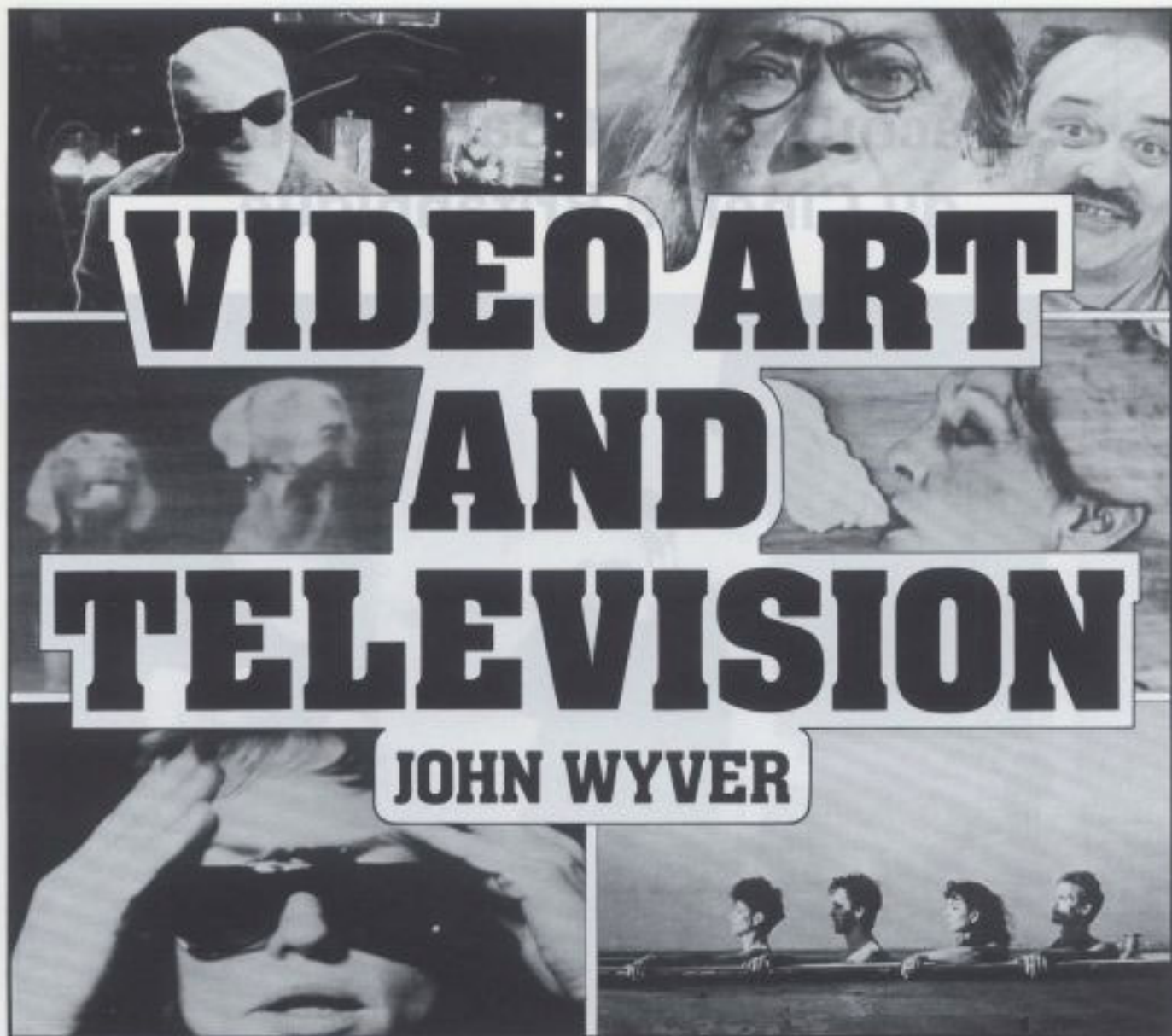
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**U**ntil the early 1980s, broadcast television mostly ignored the tradition of electronic image-making conventionally identified as video art. Twenty years of intense experiment and exploration into the potential of the cathode ray tube was rejected by broadcasters who, if they were aware of this work at all, dismissed it as amateurish, elitist, inaccessible and irrelevant. In contrast, video art's reciprocal sense of the mainstream medium was always, as it remains, more complex and ambivalent.

One central dynamic within video art has been explicitly oppositional, concerned with the deconstruction of television's languages and the suggestion of, indeed often the insistence on, alternatives. For many artists, however, such a strategy seemed arid if it was pursued only within a museum and gallery culture, which is inadequately funded and reaches minimal audiences. Television itself, assuming its interest could be aroused, offered the possibility of budgets and ratings, even if both would initially be rather low. And the hand that fed in this way might still be

bitten. As a consequence, much video art over the past decade has exhibited a willingness to work with television.

More recently, certain elements of television have been prepared to recognise, and occasionally embrace, the possibilities and achievements of video art. Broadcasters like Channel 4, the French subscription service Canal Plus, and parts of the Public Broadcasting System (pbs) in the United States have begun both to feature video art within their schedules and to fund, to a limited degree, new works. Parallel to this developing but often marginalised interest, those who commission and produce the high-profile, immediate-impact elements of television, like music videos, commercials and programme title sequences, have come to recognise the commercial potential of (versions of) video art. Techniques and styles pioneered by video artists, and in some cases the artists themselves, have been employed to publicise and advertise Paul Simon and Pet Shop Boys, Brylcreem, Martini and much else.

One strand of opinion within the video community asserts that this mutual coming-to-terms has entailed

unacceptable compromises, and that video art has been distracted and perhaps damaged by being encouraged to appeal to the alien precepts of the mainstream. The present writer believes just the opposite. For me, much of the most surprising, engaging and challenging image-making that I have encountered in recent years in any medium has been stimulated and shaped by a productive tension between the history, ideas and concerns of video art and the history, ideas and demands of broadcast television.

**A** relationship, and a tension, was established even before the arrival of video art as such. Among the first acknowledgments of television in the fine arts was an exhibition mounted by Wolf Vostell in Cologne in 1959, in which the artist presented television sets which had been damaged or broken, daubed with paint and even shot at with a gun. A comparable response to television's seductiveness was demonstrated in Nam June Paik's 1963 gallery show of monitors on which the images were electronically distorted. Two years later, in October 1965, Paik acquired

one of the first of Sony's new portable video cameras to enter the United States. The same day, according to video art's cherished account of its genesis, he recorded an impression of a papal visit to New York and showed the result that night in a club.

Before this, television had also demonstrated a certain interest in what were to become identified as concerns central to video art's development. By 1964, at Boston's public television station WGBH, the young producer Fred Barayk was using abstract visuals to accompany live music, and these first tentative experiments soon blossomed into an artist-in-residence programme and early television presentations of tapes by independent video artists. Driven by ideas about the democratising potential of video technology, the PBS stations KQED in San Francisco and WNET in New York also subsequently secured funding for experimental television operations, the most elaborate of which was WNET's TV Lab which was active between 1972 and 1983.

Two important figures working in television in the 1950s are also now hailed as pioneering visionaries who exploited the full creative range of electronic images. Yet neither Ernie Kovacs, a popular television comedian in the United States, nor the French writer and director Jean-Christophe Averty would have identified their practice as video art. They were both entertainers, interested in reaching a broad popular audience, but both were fascinated by the possibilities of breaking with the conventions and codes of broadcast television.

As early as 1951, Kovacs was slyly exposing the mechanics of television production, with an edition of his NBC show *It's Time for Ernie* featuring whispered instructions from the camera operator and Ernie himself rushing forward to polish the camera's lens. Over the next decade (until his death in 1962) his anarchic tricks grew ever more sophisticated and complex, so that in 1957 he could mount *Eugene*, a 30-minute NBC drama, with sound effects and music but no dialogue, in which gravity appears to have gone haywire. The visual comedy, often achieved by simple but brilliantly imaginative camera tricks, is probably the closest the small screen has come to the achievements of Buster Keaton.

Jean-Christophe Averty began making jazz programmes for French television in the 1950s. But it was in his 1964 series *Les Raisins Verts* that he first exploited fully the creative potential of electronic images. Marrying the surreal spirit of playwright Alfred Jarry (whose *Ubu Roi* Averty later mounted for television) with the idea of the screen as a page on which all manner of graphic effects could be achieved, Averty created an entirely distinctive style. Adaptations of Cocteau, Jules Verne, Shakespeare and Lewis Carroll followed, but his vision was only grudgingly supported and after 1974 he retired from the medium.

Ideas at the heart of Averty's creations, and of Kovacs' work, have fuelled many subsequent television comedies, including the NBC's *Monty Python's Flying Circus* and the more recent CBS series *Pee-wee Herman's Playhouse*, but the same concerns with exploration and exposure of the specific qualities of the electronic medium have also informed many of the strands of video art. Video's development, however, was quite separate from this mainstream, and in its early years, its aesthetics paralleled those of the visual arts world within which the new medium was nurtured. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, artists in the United States and elsewhere were challenging all the traditional understandings of painting and sculpture. Frustrated by what were perceived as restrictive limitations, these artists sought to reach beyond the traditional forms and consequently they engaged not only with video, but also with conceptual art, with original

understandings of photography, with performance, environments and earth-works.

The video technology available at the time was comparatively crude and inflexible. Although the Sony 'portapak' cameras and 1/2" reel-to-reel recorders were lightweight and easy to operate, they offered only a low-definition black and white image, and their editing capability was exceptionally limited. They were, however, well-suited to the documentation of performances by individuals, and this became one key element in the early aesthetics of video. The artist William Wegman, for example, recorded in the early 1970s numerous comic vignettes, often with his dog Man Ray, which are simple, absurd and still wonderfully funny. In one he teaches Man Ray to spell, in another Man Ray and a canine friend execute a routine in which their heads twist and turn in perfect synchronisation, until it is revealed that they are

*Ghosts in the Machine I:*  
Untitled work  
by William Wegman;  
Man Ray, right.



A work by  
Jaap Drupsteen.

*Invisible Television:*  
A Gorilla Tapes  
production using  
'scratch' techniques.



simply watching the out-of-frame movements of a tennis ball.

Vito Acconci's performances for video, like *Undertone* (1972) and *Theme Song* (1973), are more poetic, and more intense, monologues which draw the viewer into an intimacy with the artist and in this way create a challenging and direct personal relationship. His later, ambitious *The Red Tapes* (1977) extends these ideas in an examination of how, or even if, a new and 'truthful' image of the United States can be created. Works such as these, and those by the performance artist Joan Jonas, perhaps most especially *Vertical Roll* (1972), refuse the position (which television constantly assumes) of neutral and objective observer for the camera and viewer and implicate both in the work.

After 1970 when, in one of several parallel research programmes, Nam June Paik and Shuya Abe built the first Paik-Abe image synthesiser,

the possibilities of manipulating, and adding colour to, video pictures opened up other areas of exploration. Paik's subsequent work, such as *Global Groove* (1973), combines an eclectic range of found imagery (taken from television) with abstract visuals. Other artists instituted related investigations into the specific, formal qualities of video. The videotapes of Peter Campus, for example *Three Transitions* (1973), use straightforward technical effects to reveal the perceptual boundaries of the medium. But while this work does connect with the contemporaneous 'structural' concerns of avant-garde film, video was concerned to establish itself as a quite distinct art form. In retrospect, the medium can be seen to have set itself apart both from a tradition such as the cinema's avant-garde on which it might have drawn profitably and, in a different way, from the histories and forms of broadcast television. True to its emergence within the visual arts, video

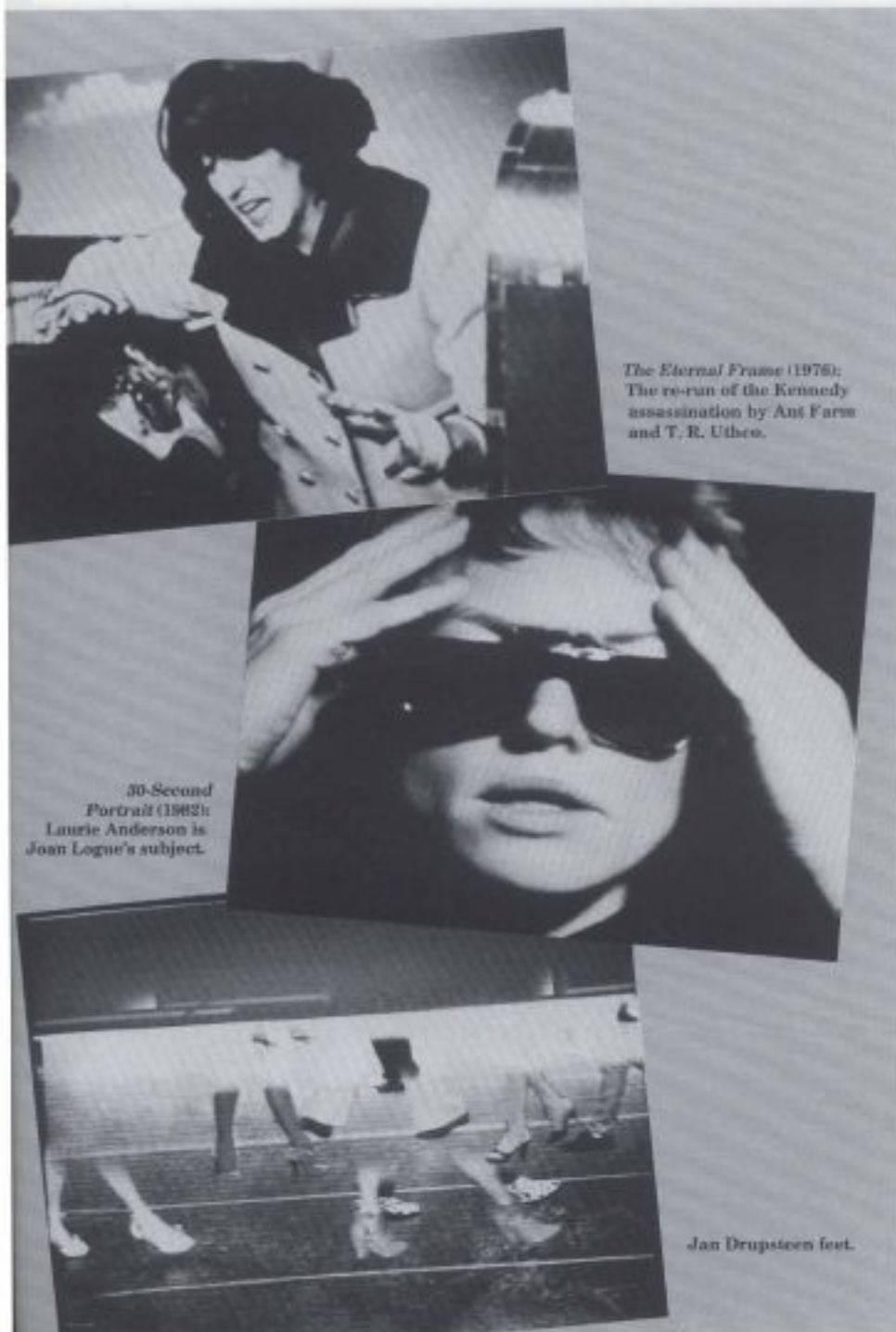
was seen as a personal, private medium, which while it might engage with broader aesthetic debates or with social and political issues, was still quite different from the public medium of television.

Television, none the less, increasingly became a focus for video. Richard Serra and Carlotta Schoolman's classic *Television Delivers People* (1973) is an on-screen roll of texts from conferences about the nature of television advertising. 'The product of television, commercial television, is the audience,' reads one statement, and another baldly suggests that, 'What television teaches through commercialism is materialistic consumption.' The low-key visual form is deliberately intended to work against the constant flow of television's high-gloss images, while the accompanying Muzak is an ironic counterpoint.

Another engagement with television is suggested by Martha Rosler's influential tapes *A Budding Gourmet* (1974) and *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975). In these the artist appropriates the familiar television format of a cooking programme and turns it on its head to become a vehicle for social and political analysis. Dan Graham's sculptural and conceptual projects in the early 1970s, which were interested in the interactive possibilities of cable television, were another suggestive approach to video by which a society's structures of power might be examined and challenged. And the multi-media collective Ant Farm took on these issues in *Media Burn* (1975) and *The Eternal Frame* (1976), made in association with T. R. Uthco. The former is a record of an open-air art event in which a remodelled 1959 Cadillac El Dorado was driven through a pyramid of blazing television sets, but it is also an at times hilarious commentary on news coverage. As is *The Eternal Frame* which spookily re-stages the assassination of President Kennedy in Dealey Plaza, Dallas. The tape is irreverent, tasteless and memorable.

A quite different but related strategy was that adopted by Dara Birnbaum's videotapes like *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman* (1978-9) and *Kojak/Wang* (1981). These are witty and engaging encounters with popular television, which collage, re-run and re-edit selected television sequences. Like Ant Farm's tapes, they are also clear demonstrations of the fundamental ambivalence of much video art towards television. In part they are attracted and fascinated by icons like Kojak and Wonder Woman, just as Ant Farm are obsessed with the media image of Kennedy, yet they are also concerned to reveal the structures of power which these icons embody.

By the late 1970s, there was the sense of a 'second generation' of video artists. Creators like Dara Birnbaum or Joan Logue, who began a project of making 30-second 'television commercials' for other artists, recognised the overwhelming necessity of



*The Eternal Frame* (1976):  
The re-run of the Kennedy  
assassination by Ant Farm  
and T. R. Uthco.

30-Second  
Portrait (1982):  
Laurie Anderson is  
Joan Logue's subject.

Jan Drupsteen feet.

dealing with the forms and functions of television, and for attaining a different balance between the private and public components of the art. Consequently, they sought ways of engagement which were not simply oppositional. They also wanted better budgets than were available from galleries or as grants, and they were hungry for larger audiences. Narrative, comedy and popular music were among the attractions with which video artists began to work. Another key figure in this shift towards television is John Sanborn, who said in 1981, 'The fact is we are interested in television. Either in changing it, adapting it, getting rich off it, co-opting it, incorporating it, selling it, free-basing it or just plain getting our work on it.'

Sanborn's videotapes, and his collaborations first with Kit Fitzgerald and more recently with Mary Perillo, are as central to contemporary video as Paik's were to the earlier generation. For Sanborn has constantly pushed electronic image-making to its limits, embracing not only conventional video but also digitally generated images, in tapes like *Luminare* (1985) created with Dean Winkler, and high-definition video. Sanborn has also established productive relationships with television institutions, receiving commissions for music videos, being invited by manufacturers to work with the latest technical achievements, and making work like the large-scale 'video opera' *Perfect Lives* (1983-5), conceived with musician Robert Ashley and part-funded by Channel 4.

Just as there was by the early 1980s a changing attitude towards television on the part of many artists, so (just a few) broadcasters began to reconsider their view of independent video. Until then television had rarely offered either its facilities or its airtime for the production and screening of video art. In the United States, the PBS operations already mentioned were complemented by scattered screenings on local cable systems, to which public access was statutorily guaranteed. European television stations occasionally accommodated artists and activists like Gerry Schum, who mounted a number of video art shows for Dutch television in the 1970s. And in Britain, broadcasting's portals were breached on exceptional occasions like David Hall's series of short works, designed as enigmatic interruptions to the schedule and made for Scottish Television in 1971, and an edition of the BBC's *Arena* devoted to video in 1976.

The prospects for the broadcasting of video art have improved significantly over the past decade. One important initiative is the Contemporary Art Television (CAT) Fund, set up in 1985 as a joint venture between WGBH and Boston's Institute of Contemporary Arts. This has sponsored, and secured television screenings for, new work by many established artists including Joan Jonas, Daniel Reeves, Chip Lord and Irene Segalove. In 1986 the PBS station in Minneapolis, KTCA, secured adequate

backing and a network slot for a series of contemporary dance, performance and video art. *Alive from Off Center* is now widely recognised as an important showcase for, and producer of, work by artists like Laurie Anderson, John Sanborn and Charlie Atlas.

Comparable initiatives, although mostly on a modest scale, have been undertaken by a number of European broadcasters. Among the most intriguing of these is the commitment to video of the French commercial service Canal Plus. A subscription channel consisting mostly of movies and sport, Canal Plus uses snappy video jokes as a way of establishing its difference from the other French channels. The distinguished French artist Michel Jaffrenou, for example, has made an extensive series of 30-second visual puns with a character called Jim Tracking, and these are used to break up and punctuate the channel's schedule.

In Britain, video art has benefited

greatly from the arrival of Channel 4, which has a statutory duty 'to encourage innovation and experiment in the form and content of programmes.' In early 1986 the channel screened six compilations of video art from North America and Europe under the title *Ghosts in the Machine*. With the help of three consultants, I had selected and packaged these programmes over the previous year, and was obviously pleased that they were well received, both by critics and by sizeable audiences. Included in them were a number of the tapes mentioned above, with William Wegman's work proving particularly popular. In a bizarre coincidence, the edition which included *The Eternal Frame* was transmitted on the evening of the Challenger space shuttle disaster, so that as the other networks were obsessively re-running the shots of the midair explosion, Channel 4 offered an equally obsessive repeated reprise of Kennedy's assassination.

*Ghosts in the Machine I*  
*Ear to the Ground*,  
John Sanborn  
and Kit Fitzgerald's  
video on New York  
avant-garde musician  
David Van Tieghem.



*Ghosts in the Machine II*: Compagnie  
Jean Gaudin in *Les  
Palais d'Esmandes*.

*Ghosts in the Machine I*  
*Double Lunar Dogs*  
by Joan Jonas.



*Ghosts in the Machine* appeared to complement usefully other initiatives by the channel, most especially the collections of British work *Video 1, 2 and 3*, put together by Triplevision in 1985 (*Video 4 and 5* followed in December 1987), and the presentation of individual pieces in other contexts, such as Robert Caen's video visualisation of Pierre Boulez' musical composition *Repons* (1985) and Jaap Drupsteen's version of Stravinsky's 'opera for television' *The Flood* (1986). All these contributed to a growing awareness of video art, and to a broadening of interest in its traditions and concerns beyond its usual limited audience.

After the first series of *Ghosts in the Machine* (which had been made with the production company Illuminations) it seemed essential to encourage not only the purchasing and presentation of completed work, but also the commissioning of new pieces. Channel 4

had already begun to undertake this with important offerings by producer Anna Ridley, including her innovative programmes with artist and diarist Ian Breakwell. The *Eleventh Hour* series had also financed some new work, including David Larcher's extraordinary feature-length video poem *x rvc* and the contribution by Anne Wilson and Marty St James to the international video project *Time Code*.

*Ghosts in the Machine II* was consequently conceived as a strand of short individual pieces, to be made by both British and foreign artists. It intended to reflect a broad range of styles, techniques, ideas and concerns, and to bring these together with accessibility and appeal for television, without compromising the tradition's individuality. In a sense, each piece was a contribution to the negotiation between the kinds of private (from video's fine arts background) and public (from the attractions of television) impulses identified above.

One gratifying aspect of the project's preparations was the willingness on the part of other broadcasters to co-finance new works for the series. The opening programme *Steps* by the Polish artist Zbigniew Rybczynski (known as 'Zbig'), who now lives in the United States, was produced by his own company Zbig Vision and KTCB Minneapolis for *Alive from Off Center*, and Channel 4 pre-purchased the work to help make it possible. Other pieces have been made with Canal Plus and with Belgian and Canadian producers for television. Video art origination has begun, finally, to be accepted by broadcasters internationally. The series also benefited hugely from a relationship with the Arts Council of Great Britain, co-funding with them a bursary scheme for the production of 10 'pilot' projects. Four of these were then developed further for broadcast, but all ten will be seen in other contexts. This was conceived as one way in which television could contribute to the development of the independent video and film sector, from which (or so this article argues) it is now drawing significant benefit.

Zbig's *Steps* is an example of a work which draws not only on the traditions of video, but also those of classic animation (his film *Tango* won the Oscar for Best Animation in 1983). It is entirely original, yet it is made for television without any implicit apology or self-consciousness. During its 25 minutes, Zbig transports a party of American tourists into the world of Eisenstein's 1925 film *Battleship Potemkin*. Using his own unique technique, which combines travelling mattes and chromakey work, he inserts the tourists right into the dramatic events of the Odessa Steps massacre, so that the action of the film happens all around them. The immediate impact of the video is genuinely astonishing, and as it develops it becomes a funny and disturbing reflection on America and Russia, the past and the present, and real life and movies.

Among the other programmes there is *Ulysse au pays des merveilles*, in which Michel Jaffrenou makes a comparable use of the state-of-the-art post-production possibilities. The digital editing system known as Harry has enabled him to stage the bones of Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey* in the back of a Parisian taxi. But not all the new works are entranced by technology, and many are simply imaginative responses to the possibilities of low-tech. Akiko Hada and the Japanese-American Toy Theatre of London, for example, have created a new role for James Bonk (sic) in *Matt Blackfinger*. The role of Bonk is filled by a four-inch-high green-and-yellow wind-up Godzilla, and all the other characters, including Um and Miss Money-yenny, are also played by toys.

New video within an art context like *Ghosts in the Machine* is not, however, the only appearance of such work on television. For the producers of



A Triplevision programme for Channel 4's *Eleventh Hour* series.



Zbig's *Steps*.



*Steps*: American tourists in the world of *Battleship Potemkin*.

both commercials and music promos, video art is emerging as an important source of ideas, styles and, on occasion, directors. Both forms demand the maximum impact from a brief sequence of images, and both can accommodate innovation if the impression it makes is sufficiently memorable. Both forms also enjoy comparatively high budgets, and both are voracious consumers of original conceptions, constantly demanding 'Make it new'.

Notable music videos by artists include Joan Logue's dazzling accompaniment to Paul Simon's *René and Magritte* (1984), Sanborn and Winkler's *Act III* (1983) with music by Philip Glass, and numerous pieces by Zbig, with Herbie Hancock, Accept, Grandmaster Flash, Pet Shop Boys, Mick Jagger and others. More generally, of course, video art has been one of the shaping influences on the aesthetic of music videos, and on successful artists like David Byrne and Laurie Anderson who have 'crossed-over' from a fine arts background to the commercial mainstream.

Advertising is equally interested, as is evidenced by the numerous requests for viewing cassettes which Channel 4 received from agencies after the transmission of *Ghosts in the Machine*. The identification of direct influences is tricky, but the complexity of images in many current commercials indicates a sensibility, and a recognition of the audience's sophistication in reading images, which is very close to the video art tradition. Personal favourites recently which appear close to this history are the fragmented surveillance story which promoted the new (and which was parodied by artist George Barber in a short tape commissioned by Channel 4's *The Media Show*) and the extraordinary games with reality and fiction played out in thirty seconds within the current Martini spots.

One direct appropriation, however, was the way in which the industry picked up the technique known as 'scratch'. This form of rapid re-editing of found images so as to reveal or construct other meanings produced a number of memorable, angry and politically pointed videotapes like the Duvet Brothers' *Blue Monday* (1984) and Gorilla Tapes' *Death Valley Days* (1985). But it was soon being exploited to sell, among other products, Brylcreem, for which the ad agency re-cut and re-worked archive advertisements from the 1950s.

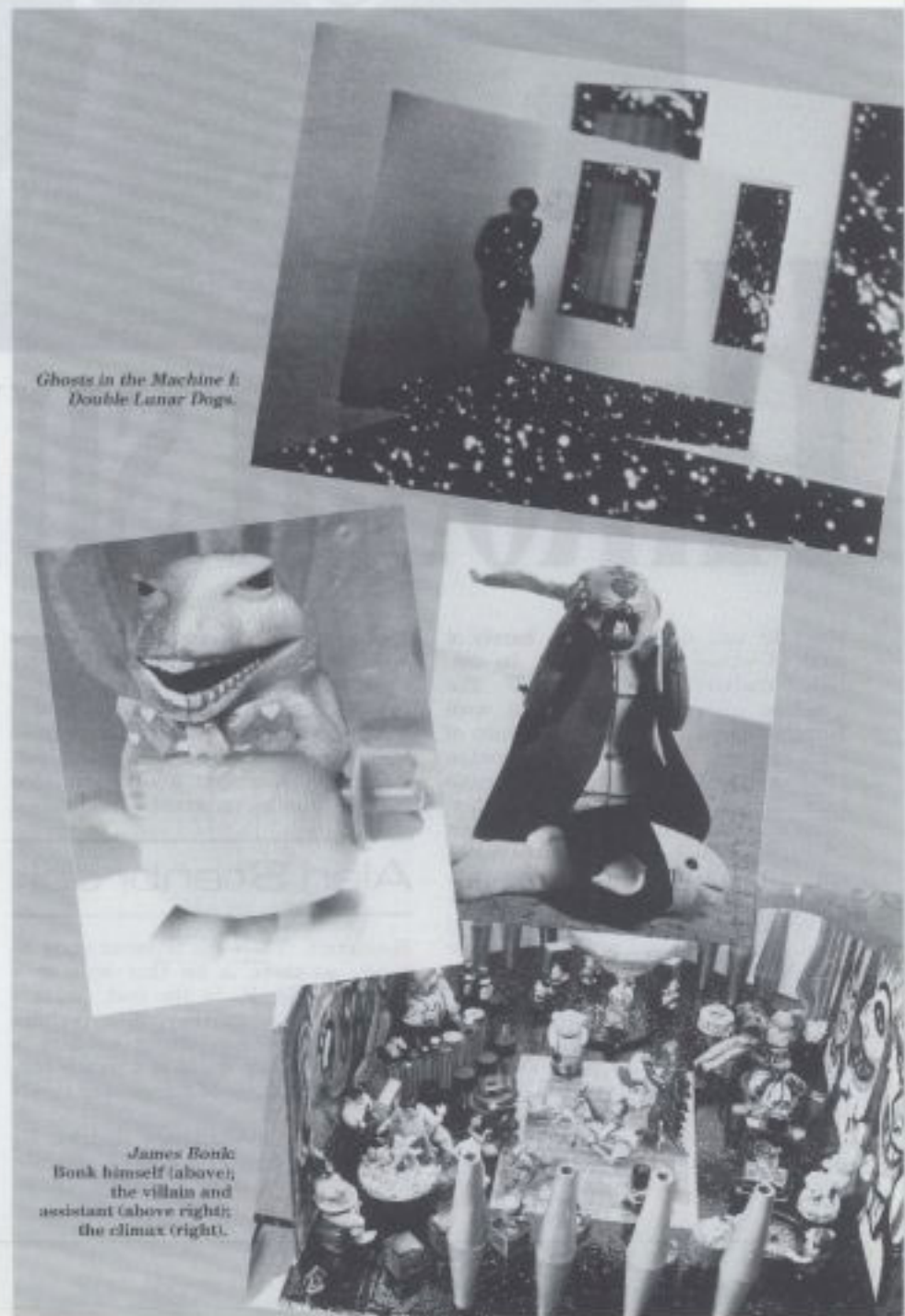
There are obvious dangers in this kind of cross-over, not the least of which is that the artists receive neither recognition nor compensation for their work. But the approach of the purist should also be avoided. The traditions of both television and video art, as well as those of the cinema and other visual media, are now part of a swirling image mix available for all kinds of use. Artists like Zbig and John Sanborn exploit this mix in peculiarly creative and stimulating ways, and it is their work, and that by many other artists, which supports

my belief that the 'cross-over' work on the boundaries of both television and video art is among the most surprising, engaging and challenging image-making in any medium today.

**A**s a postscript, and in part because *SIGHT AND SOUND* addresses itself to video so rarely (some of) the inadequacies of this article should be noted. It attempts a very broad survey of certain interactions between television and video art. There are many aspects of this relationship not touched on here, not least the social documentary and political action strands of independent video which also developed in opposition to the broadcast media, and which more recently have found their own accommodations with television. Moreover, and more importantly, there are many significant elements within the history and the current state of video which are inappropriate to include within a discussion of video and television, but

which are equally, and perhaps even more, worthy of attention. As well as single-channel pieces, for example, there is a long and important tradition of video installations, which are all too rarely shown in Britain.

Most of the tapes discussed here are from the United States. The bias is partly a personal prejudice, but it also reflects the greater support which video has enjoyed from funders and from museums there over the past twenty years. Most of the tapes discussed are by white men, and yet there are enormously rich currents of work by feminist artists, and by African and Asian image-makers, both in this country and abroad. Critical engagements with the whole history of video, and perhaps particularly with this work, are lamentably few, and there is an urgent need for further writing and analysis if we are to understand and appreciate more fully the achievements and potential of video. ■



*Ghosts in the Machine II: Double Lunar Dogs.*

*James Bonk: Bonk himself (above); the villain and assistant (above right); the climax (right).*

# ON THE TRACK OF



# HIROSHI SHIMIZU

How far can a film-maker, barely a sixth of whose work is extant, be usefully analysed and discussed? The question is especially pertinent with Hiroshi Shimizu, whose vast output of more than 150 films, made between 1924 and 1959, boils down to little more than 25 that can still be seen today. What's more, nothing survives from the 1920s, so Shimizu's career in the silent era is now represented by only one picture of 1933 vintage, *Japanese Girls at the Harbour*. (Sound came late and fitfully to Japan and many films were still shot silent in the early 1930s.)

Ironically, Shimizu is a director marginally better known in the West than in his native Japan—and at least until the National Film Theatre's recent retrospective season, he wasn't too well known here either. With a reputation for indolence that his prodigious body of work belies, Shimizu was mysteriously never accorded his due in Japan. He

died in 1966 at the age of 63, and those who can recall him at all have pigeonholed him as a maker of children's films. Well, so he was, but he was a lot more besides, and even in pictures that amount to little more than pot-boilers he flourished a signature that marked him as an artist of individual

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## Alan Stanbrook

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distinction. There's a Shimizu style as surely as there is an Ozu style or a Naruse style. If, in the end, he is a lesser figure than they, it is perhaps because he seldom struck so deep a chord. Shimizu's world is a sunny one, where the sadness of things only rarely intrudes.

Biographical details are sketchy. He is known to have had a great affection for children and to have set up an

orphanage in his later years, from which he drew some of the more talented performers for his pictures. And in his youth he was, for a time, married to the actress Kinuyo Tanaka. A colourful and who knows how exaggerated account of their stormy marriage was recently given by Kon Ichikawa in his film about Miss Tanaka called *Actress*.

What can one look for from a Shimizu film? Definitely not a well-turned plot. Pretty well all the movies that still exist are episodic and anecdotal. He was never happy in a studio and liked to hit the road with nothing so formal as a screenplay, rather a collection of notes that might form a blueprint for the eventual picture. Children, whom he liked to use as often as possible, responded better, he found, to this laid-back location shooting.

Yet Shimizu's movies never smack of improvisation and a reliance on the





Left *Japanese Girls at the Harbour*. Above: *The Masseurs and a Woman*; *A Mother's Love*.

inspiration of the moment. On the contrary, they are among the most consciously planned of any Japanese works of the 1930s and the 1940s. Both in style and content, Shimizu's pictures are chock-full of devices, motifs and preoccupations that bind the body of his work together into a coherent whole. There's a world of Hiroshi Shimizu, even as there's a world of, say, John Ford.

What you will find, as often as not, is that Shimizu was a very droll bird indeed. Give people half an inch, he seems to be saying, and they will behave in remarkably funny and endearing ways. Take the two blind masseurs tip-tapping their way down the road at the start of *The Masseurs and a Woman*. Blind they may be, but Sherlock Holmes should look to his laurels. 'How many children can you hear coming down the road?' one of them asks. 'Why eight,' comes the reply. 'Wrong. There are 8½ because one of them's a baby.' And just to rub in how ultra-sensitive his antennae have become, he neatly sidesteps a pile of new-laid horse manure.

Bodily functions always made Shimizu laugh. The army recruits out on a route march in *A Star Athlete* hold their noses on the appropriate word of command as they jog past a dung cart rolling along a country lane. And bed-wetting is elevated into an almost heroic achievement. 'I drew a few maps on the bed-clothes myself,' says a grandfather to the young hero of *Tales of Jiro*. 'But you—you've charted the Pacific Ocean.' And what of the incontinent son in *A Mother's Love*? With a quiverful of offspring (by different fathers) his mother seeks to foster them all out but nobody wants the youngest because he wets the bed every night. At last she gives up the quest and agrees to keep him, whereupon he strides manfully out

into the night and, in a closing shot of Homeric stature, fountains his joy to the four winds.

Yes, he's a funny film-maker is Hiroshi Shimizu. One of the most rib-tickling of his movies is *Mr Shosuke Ohara*. The name is a type, as one might say Mr Micawber. He's the epitome of the bibulous loafer who fritters away his fortune through idle living. This Mr Shosuke Ohara is a once powerful landowner reduced to penury by the Occupation land reforms and by his own financial incompetence. He gets caught up in politics and becomes inadvertent speechmaker for the most disreputable candidate in a local election, where the opposition candidate is a priest. Shimizu milks the scenes on the hustings for maximum comic effect. The priest, unversed in the ways of politics, chants his manifesto at the street corner like a mantra, while Mr Ohara promises that his candidate will give priority attention to every requirement of the neighbourhood. 'Do everything first is his slogan.'

It's one of Shimizu's richest comedies, in which Mr Ohara is pitched (Groucho versus Dumont) against the awful village benefactress, Mrs Margaret Nakata, who wants to westernise the environment and turn all the local lasses into seamstresses. In one of the funniest scenes, she keeps up a non-stop barrage of instructions to the girls as they clatter away at their Singer sewing machines and a priest bangs ever more loudly on his prayer drum to drown out the noise. Shimizu found appalling rackets inherently funny. In films made nine years apart, *Ornamental Hairpin* (1941) and *A Mother's Love* (1950), guests at a wayside inn are not once but twice in each picture discommoded by the sudden arrival of a giggle of girls. Rowdy nights indeed in old Japan.

Shimizu was a director manifestly in love with life. Its oddities brought out the best in him. In *Japanese Girls at the Harbour*, the earliest Shimizu film still available, there is a touching scene in which an out-of-work painter is seen at home, dressed in a pinafore, doing the weekly wash while his wife is out earning a few yen in the only way she knows how. And in *Four Seasons of Childhood* (1939), there is a beautiful moment when the stern, no-nonsense grandpa, who has refused on principle to read any begging letter from his grandson, furtively tries to snatch a squint at it when he thinks no one is looking.

Human detail was a source of endless fascination to Shimizu. One scene in *Mr Shosuke Ohara* will ring all too painfully true to any man who has ever had an altercation with a cricket ball. As it's Japan, they are playing baseball. It's a long shot, giving ample perspective on the whole pitch. The ball is hurled at the batsman, struck vigorously, and the bowler collapses clutching his groin while the stretcher-bearers rush in to cart him off to casualty. It's just a throwaway scene with hardly any bearing on the main action, but it's lifelike and, to the spectator, funny in the way that sudden misfortune can often be.

Not that Shimizu reduces all human life to a joke. In 1941 (a vintage year, in which he made three of his most varied and resonant features, *The Introspection Tower*, *Ornamental Hairpin* and *Notes of an Itinerant Performer*), Shimizu also found time to knock out an enchanting short film about the toughening up of a crybaby. Called *Acorns*, it has elements that link it to the official militarist policy of the time—notably the message that there will be no place for puppies in the troubled times to come. Nevertheless, the scenes in which he is taken in hand by a kindly uncle and secretly trained to overcome his fear, to climb



Children in the Wind.



Children of the Beehive.

trees and to cross streams on a narrow plank, will seem convincing to anyone not naturally imbued with the Duke of Edinburgh spirit.

Shimizu's world, like Ozu's, is not wide. It gains its power and conviction from the way the director uses recurring motifs and themes. Films made years apart echo one another in detail if not in outline. There's a reassuring sense of recognition, of being among friends, in the way Shimizu repeats scenes and effects. In *Children and the Great Buddha*, made in 1952, children are still tripping precariously along the rails of wooden bridges as they did thirteen years before in *Four Seasons of Childhood*. It is as if, in the realm of infants, the war had never been.

The films repeat themselves because children of all ages (and all lands) generally play the same pranks, have the same fun, the same fears and the same little tragedies. The boy in *Acorns* learns to shin up oak trees as dextrously as the kids in *Mr Shosuke Ohara* go climbing for cherries. A brisk dip in the river features in the prewar *Children in the Wind* and *Four Seasons of Childhood* as conspicuously as in the late movie *Tales of Jiro* (1955). Similarly, the remarkable scene in *Ornamental Hairpin* in which the camera tracks up alongside Chishu Ryu as, his leg in plaster, he mounts an enormous flight of stone steps is mirrored precisely in *The Shinomi School*, made fourteen years later.

Shimizu was fond of depicting challenges to be overcome. Also from *Ornamental Hairpin* is a virtuoso sequence in which Chishu Ryu tries to cross a bridge (his leg has been injured through stepping accidentally on a hairpin while taking a bath). Shimizu builds this sequence up into a notable victory, which he films for all it is worth and then some. Ryu's hobbling progress is cheered on throughout by an army

of children and then completed with Kinuyo Tanaka, the original cause of his misfortune, carrying him piggy-back on the last leg. And the triumph is finally trumped when two blind masseurs (refugees from *The Masseurs and a Woman*?) subsequently make light work of the crossing.

The bridge-crossing scene from *Ornamental Hairpin* is one of the most successful of Shimizu's big set-piece sequences but, scattered through his work, there are many like it. In *The Introspection Tower*, a study of a reform school for recalcitrant children, there is a marvellous example in which the inmates discover a sense of social responsibility through the construction of a water chute to replace an exhausted artesian well. One of the most impressive of all such sequences unfortunately seems temporarily lost. *Children of the Beehive*, seen in an earlier NFF season and scheduled to feature again in the most recent survey, went missing in Paris. Though not among Shimizu's finest studies of youthful vagrants and vagabonds, it contains an inspiring sequence, made up almost entirely of ascending tracking shots, in which two children scale a daunting cliff face piggy-back fashion. It echoes back to the no less fraught obstacle courses and piggy-back rides of *Ornamental Hairpin* and *Four Seasons of Childhood*. Nothing in Shimizu's world is forgotten; everything has an afterglow that is often brighter than the earlier scene it reflects.

How often, for example, Shimizu staged key sequences on little wooden bridges that seem to mark turning points in his characters' lives. Here couples part, thoughts are left unspoken, children bid farewell to their parents and, in *Four Seasons of Childhood*, the device is raised to its most exalted level in the silent meeting between the two principal women

characters, where emotions go too deep for words.

If one had to single out the distinguishing mark of a Shimizu picture, it would be the film-maker's delight in the moving camera. Many directors, from Ophuls to Mizoguchi, have turned the tracking shot into high art, but few have done so with such zeal as Hiroshi Shimizu. Whether the material he was working from was worthy or not (and sometimes, in his later years, it has to be conceded that it was not), Shimizu seldom lost an opportunity for the most elaborate and eye-popping travelling shots.

He had tricks that he made uniquely his own. Film after film starts in full flight, with the camera dollying back down one of Japan's rustic roads, clearing the path, as it were, for a solitary rider clip-clopping towards us, or a party of hikers out for a stroll in the afternoon sun, or indeed a couple of blind men wending their way towards an inn for the night. Nobody loved the open road more than Shimizu and he rejoiced in letting the camera track lazily back down the byways of prewar Japan.

He loved it best when he could build the sequence into a kind of running commentary on contemporary life. The bus in *Mr Thank You* and the army patrol in *A Star Athlete* overtake, as they pass down the road, what amounts to a cross-section of society. Shimizu always shot these encounters in the same way. The camera first advances towards a fellow traveller on the road as if it were seeing him subjectively, there's an optical dissolve to a reverse angle and then the camera tracks back as the wayfarer recedes waving into the distance. *A Star Athlete* embodies this formula at its most audacious. More than usually episodic even for a Shimizu film, it includes an eleven-



Dancing Girl.



Mr Thank You.

minute tour de force made up of some two-score travelling shots pacing and trailing the course of an army of students out on a two-day route march. Subtly varying the angles, now dollying forward, now dollying back, now marching, now jogging at the double or letting the camera break free to follow a simulated infantry charge, Shimizu here created a sequence close to pure cinema, in which the matter is almost entirely subservient to the form.

These kind of shots are complemented in nearly every surviving film with lateral tracking shots of no less panache. A favourite device is to track along a wall, coming to rest just past a corner so that we can see who is advancing down the road towards us. The most spectacular lateral tracks, however, are those in which Shimizu sweeps the camera right through a constructed set and out the other side. The most striking instance is in *Mr Shosuke Ohara* after our bankrupt hero agrees to put up all his belongings to auction. As the bidding proceeds, there is an enormous, sustained tracking shot straight through the house, out into the yard, across it, and past the removal men, coming to rest on Ohara's wife, who then addresses the camera: it has been a subjective shot all along.

Another fine example is to be found in the otherwise indifferent 1957 movie called *Dancing Girl*. By this late stage in his career, Shimizu shot scripts of decidedly variable quality and *Dancing Girl*, in which virtuous Chikage Awashima is left holding the baby for her no-good sister, played by Machiko Kyo, is one of the more banal. But it does boast some wonderful, prowling travelling shots through the lights of Asakusa and a brilliant sequence in the theatre as the chorines sweep off stage and Shimizu's camera races with them through the wings and into their dressing-rooms. This film also carries

an erotic charge not reflected in any other of Shimizu's surviving films. We shall never know, perhaps, whether this marked a new departure or picked up a strand from the many lost works.

So much is missing that some individual films seem curiously out of kilter with the rest. *Notes of an Itinerant Performer* is a case in point. Its plot, which centres on the single-minded efforts of an ex-actress to revitalise her patron's business, is the kind of feminist subject that Mizoguchi made his own. Shimizu, too, handled it well, but one would love to know whether he ever tackled such a theme again (or before).

As his career developed, Shimizu appeared to abandon certain stylistic devices with which he experimented in youth. There's no sequel to the jump cuts that he used in *Japanese Girls at the Harbour* to depict a somewhat lurid shooting incident in a church, and he seems to have ceased, after the 1930s, to employ the rather self-consciously avant-garde trick of making characters disappear by stop-motion photography.

Features that he never abandoned were the predilection for extreme long shots and a concern to end his films with sequences of concentrated poetic power. This is seen as early as *Japanese Girls at the Harbour*, which concludes with the departure of an ocean-going liner and a magical shot of bunting curling wantonly round a capstan at the end of the jetty. Among the films of childhood, who will forget the last scene of *Children and the Great Buddha*, in which the orphan who scratches a meagre living as a temple guide in Nara spends one last night curled asleep in the Buddha's lap? Or the young acrobat who performs a joyous cartwheel to sign off *Children in the Wind*?

The last scenes of *The Masseurs and a Woman* and *Ornamental Hairpin*, in which lovers are left alone, mourning

what might have been but was never spoken, are moments of great pathos and Shimizu filmed them with a touch of the poet. But is this enough to elevate him to the ranks of the very greatest Japanese directors? Is he not, in the end, a *petit maitre* for all his charm?

One might be inclined to think so, though a good case can be made that *Children in the Wind* and its sequel *Four Seasons of Childhood* (which share the same cast playing the same characters) are the acme of his career as a humanist. Shimizu's heart was unmistakably in the right place. What one misses, on the whole, is a sense of the wider currents of Japanese history. But there is an exception. *Mr Thank You*, that chirpy, cheerful bus ride through the dusty backroads of rural Japan, accompanied by an unrelieved soundtrack of bouncy muzak, is the Shimizu film that comes closest to a full-scale social portrait of the 1930s.

It has an underlying melancholy very far from the simple joie de vivre its surface humour implies. What, after all, are the passengers on this country bus route talking about? About young girls who cross the pass to the paper mills and never make the journey back; about failed businessmen in the depression years forced to sell their daughters into prostitution; about those who lose their minds because they have had to do so. 'These days, when babies are born,' says a young mother, 'we should give condolences, not congratulations.' And even the bus driver thinks his job is more like driving a hearse than public transport. *Mr Thank You* is not a film that smiles through the tears but one that speaks out in anger behind the superficial good humour. And that at a time when Japan was only a few short years away from the Pacific war. There was clearly more to Hiroshi Shimizu than met the eye. Shall we ever know how much? ■

PETER GREEN

# Germanys Abroad



HERZOG · WENDERS · ADLON

It is twenty-six years since the Oberhausen Manifesto launched the New German Cinema. Now many of the angry young men of the early years are in their fifties; their viewpoint has shifted and the generation that has followed them lacks much of the élan and motivation of those pioneering days. With the return to a conservative political order in the 80s, sights are set on economic viability in German film rather than experimental dynamics or social controversy.

Aspects of change are the attempts to revive screen comedy (for example, Doris Dörrie's *Men*) and a growing internationalism. Not all directors of the New German Cinema were preoccupied with domestic issues or national history anyway. Werner Herzog had from the beginning sought his visual images in the remoter corners of the world, and went further and further afield in

search of them. Wim Wenders, like many German directors of the early years, went to America, not so much in search of a larger audience, but in the hope of finding the essential images of our modern civilisation and better production conditions. In the long run, however, few directors found there what they were really looking for; nor were the Germans the only Europeans seeking their fortune in America.

With film financing becoming increasingly difficult in Germany, several directors, notably Volker Schlöndorff and Percy Adlon, have turned to productions aimed principally at the larger English-speaking audience and based on English-language screenplays. Curiously enough, at a moment when many directors are turning their backs on Europe, Wenders has decided to return and has made one of his most convincing films for many years, *Wings of Desire*, a Franco-German production.

## Cobra Verde

Changing planes between continents, after completing *Where the Green Ants Dream* in Australia, Werner Herzog made a brief appearance in Wenders' film notebook *Tokyo-Ga*, where he describes the impossibility of finding 'transparent, pure pictures' in modern cities like Tokyo. His belief in the importance of the visual image is amply documented in his latest film *Cobra Verde* (1987).

Based on themes from Bruce Chatwin's novel *The Viceroy of Ouidah*, the film tells the story of Francisco Manoel da Silva, a South American peasant who, after years of drought, loses his entire herd of cattle. Exploited, abused and cheated out of his wages, he finally

rises against the oppression in the gold mines, commits a murder and becomes the bandit 'Cobra Verde'. Hired by a sugar-cane planter for his skills as an organiser, Francisco Manoel loses no time in seducing all three daughters of the house. To rid themselves of this much-feared bandit, the landowners send him off to West Africa, ostensibly to revive the slave trade, but in fact confident that they are dispatching him to certain death; for no one has ever returned from the land of the mad king of Dahomey.

Cobra Verde succeeds not only in establishing himself in an old Brazilian slave fort on the African coast, but in defying the patrols of the Royal Navy and reviving the slave trade itself. Before long, however, he is taken prisoner by the mad king. He only escapes death through the intervention of the king's brother, who needs the white man's skills to stage an uprising. At the height of his powers, Cobra Verde is installed as the new ruler's viceroy and reinstated in his fortress home. His fortune is not long lived, however. The slave trade has finally been abolished by Brazil. Betrayed by his backers at home, driven out by the new king, and with a price placed on his head by the British, he goes down to the sea and, in a futile bid to get away by boat, is overpowered by the waves.

The story is of epic dimensions and the terrain (Colombia, Brazil, Ghana) clearly identifiable as Herzogian. Here again the director works with his favourite actor, Klaus Kinski, who is possibly the only person with the will and stamina to endure Herzog's arduous expeditions. Vision, madness, ecstasy, set side by side with a sheer struggle for survival, are never far away in Herzog's work and are usually reflected in his settings: extreme landscapes as a visual expression of extreme states of being, the search for El Dorado in the impenetrable jungles, across the parched crust of this earth.

In *Cobra Verde* the points of reference of the search are immediately established: the arid landscape, the grave of Francisco Manoel's mother, the skeletons and carcasses of dead or dying cattle in pale grey, colourless tones; the labours in the mud of the gold mines in dark grey-browns. The scene is set in a few telling strokes and almost without dialogue. At the start of his journey Cobra Verde enters a dark bar run by a crippled boy, Euclides, who tells him of the land of snow and ice that lies four years by horse and ten years on foot to the west, in the mountains that reach up to the clouds. But Francisco Manoel chooses to go east, to the ocean, the cradle of storms, and loses sight of the vision of the snowy land. The film itself seems to forget its own aspirations, falling between two stools, succeeding neither in terms of pure action or adventure, nor on the level of a moral statement.

The terse cutting, so effective at the outset, continues throughout, suggesting that the director was battling to



*Cobra Verde*: Francisco Manoel (Klaus Kinski) with Euclides.

squeeze a wealth of material into 110 minutes and had been forced to cut all but the bones of the story. The scenes are strung together with scarcely time to breathe or develop. The result is not merely an abbreviated dramaturgy, but a lack of rhythmic contrast and a virtual absence of character development. It is almost as if Herzog had made a preparatory sketch for a vast panorama in which the intended proportions are only hinted at.

Although he furnishes his leading character at the outset with the appropriate motivation and charismatic stance, Kinski plays the part of a swashbuckling anti-hero rather than that of a visionary rebel. Cobra Verde's grudge against the world hardens him into an unscrupulous opportunist with no qualms about turning oppressor himself. In this respect he might be an entirely modern figure, a man who can 'fix' anything, from the reactivation of a declining slave trade to the overthrow of a king. But Cobra Verde lacks the magnificent obsession that distinguished even such ambivalent characters as Fitzcarraldo, with his vision of an opera house in the jungle, or Aguirre, with his dreams of a private empire. As a result, the vivid characters and memorable images of the film—the pigs in the town square; the rooms of bats and crabs; the endless semaphore line of men across the landscape, like Christo's 'Running Fence' infused with life—seem ultimately little more than incidental. The scenes of suffering that might move the viewer and have elicited compassion from the director register somewhat perfunctorily; and the cripples he directs across the screen are in danger of becoming mere figures from a cabinet of curiosities.

The latent issues of colonialism and slavery, of man's subjection to man, are insufficiently articulated. Occasional allusions to these themes—'the slaves will sell their masters and grow wings' (a written quotation at the end) or 'slavery is an attribute of the human heart'—seem to be more in the nature of an afterthought than to spring from the conviction of the work. Herzog's vision of a better world, redeemingly naive at times, is missing here.

## Tokyo-Ga

Spiritually and chronologically located somewhere between America and Europe, begun before Wenders had completed *Paris, Texas* (1984), *Tokyo-Ga* (1983-85) can be seen as an important port of call in the director's transatlantic odyssey. Over the years he has produced a series of these 'film diaries', in which he outlines his own aesthetic of cinema. (*Tokyo-Ga*, a 90-minute subjective documentary, was preceded by *Reverse Angle* and *Chambre 666*, two shorts from 1982.) 'If anything is holy in the world of cinema,' Wenders remarks at the beginning of *Tokyo-Ga*, 'it must be the work of Ozu'; and the film documents not a pilgrimage, as he hastens to add, but a search for the Tokyo of the Japanese master who died in 1963.

Ironically perhaps, Wenders, the prodigal son of German film, who returned home from the USA after years of disappointment in search of his American dream, found in Tokyo a world of neon lights and Disneyland, of Coca-Cola and Kentucky Fried Chicken,

baseball-playing, rock 'n' rolling teenagers, a surrogate neo-America that is almost a parody of the original. In the filmed studies of the pachinko pin-table saloons or the rooftop golf ranges, the essence of sport—the idea of play exposed to the vagaries of nature and the elements—is reduced to a meaningless, conveyor-belt activity in a confined space. Here one is confronted with frightening pictures of the ultimate absurdity and isolation of our mass-consumption, animated leisure world as the mirror image of the world of mass production. The Tokyo Wenders discovers is a world of fascinating veneers and imitations, from the simulated games and the re-enactment of American symbols, to the wax display models of the delicacies offered in a Japanese restaurant.

Nothing is real; nor indeed is there any outward sign of the 'places' of Ozu's world, which Wenders professes to seek; at least, not in the images the camera captures. A parallel presentation of the same locations—then and now—might have been more revealing and would have eliminated the suspicion that Wenders' fascination with the images he found diverted him from seeking any further.

The physical changes to which Tokyo has been exposed over the last thirty years or so, although perhaps more extreme than elsewhere, are essentially the same as those that have overtaken most western cities. The decline of family and nation that Wenders identifies in Ozu's films goes hand in hand with the bursting metropolis and the growing depersonalisation with which we are all familiar, and over which a series of glittering facades, of neon lights, high-speed communications and coldly smiling commercialism have been drawn.

More likely, however, Ozu's world is not to be found so much in places as in time, and Wenders' search was more in the nature of a *recherche du temps*

*perdu*. It was a world Ozu created himself and, with his aversion to working in locations open to public view, one he created largely in the studio. In that respect it was also a world that died with him, as the interviews with his colleagues Chishu Ryu and Yuharu Atsuta reveal. Both men spent most of their working lives with Ozu, Chishu Ryu impersonating often similar roles in more than 50 films, Yuharu Atsuta providing the same camera technique, at Ozu's request, in all his later works—the camera in a fixed position close to the ground, not travelling, panning or even zooming, the lens and focal length unchanging. Both men identified with Ozu to the point of seeming self-effacement. Yet both found a sense of fulfilment in their collaboration with him that they were never to achieve subsequently. On the verge of tears, Atsuta describes how the director brought out the best in him: Ozu was 'more than a director; he was like a king.'

Werner Herzog's claim, made during his brief appearance in *Tokyo-Ga*, that there are 'no pictures' in this city, that it is necessary to go to the remote corners of the earth or into space to find them, is of course disproved by the film itself. The inaccessible landscapes of Wenders' films are the asphalt jungles and the conurbations of our modern civilisation. Wenders himself speaks of 'an inflation of pictures' in the world today, describing how the camera sometimes stands in the way of observation. Ideally, one should be able to make films simply by opening one's eyes and seeing. But the images have grown hollow, and in the seductive shots of moving trains and cityscapes in *Tokyo-Ga* he is at times in danger of succumbing himself to the fascination of the world he describes.

Is *Tokyo-Ga* a search for pictures, in Herzog's understanding of cinema, a search for places, or for time lost? Wenders takes up two themes—Tokyo

yesterday and today, and the world of Yasujiro Ozu—without quite managing to fuse them into a single whole. With the exception of old black and white photographs and quotations from the Japanese director's films, Ozu's Tokyo never really emerges; although Ozu himself is never far away. But it would be a pity if the personal, documentary form of *Tokyo-Ga* were to stand in the way of its showing. It is an absorbing essay on the subject of cinema and essential viewing for anyone interested in the films of Ozu and the work of Wenders.

## Wings of Desire

In *Wings of Desire* (1987), which won him the prize for best direction in Cannes last year, Wenders finally celebrated his return home. The film is among other things an intimate and affectionate portrait of Berlin, the old metropolis of German cinema. Although *Wings of Desire* is designed on a far more ambitious scale and functions on many more levels than *Tokyo-Ga*, it has points in common with the Japanese notebook in its exploration of the urban landscape and of the nature of film. The sweep of the city and the transport systems that dissect it, the motorways and viaducts, the bridges and railway lines, have always been a motif central to Wenders' films. Here the pan of the camera takes up the movement of trains through the urban fabric in his search for the heart of Berlin in much the same way as it does in his quest for the world of Ozu.

Wenders' Berlin, destroyed by the war, ravaged by subsequent reconstruction and torn apart by the Wall, which has turned the very heart of the city into a peripheral zone, is a picture of a waste land littered with the ruins of the past and the cold concrete of postwar developments. Here Wenders resumes his search for time and place. Berlin functions both as a backdrop against which the other layers of his film are set, and as the living tissue through which Curt Bois wanders, a Homeric commentator in pursuit of the city's lost identity.

Wenders has chosen to see the city through the eyes of its guardian angels, who are condemned for the most part to play the role of observer and silent comforter to the inhabitants. Daniel, the blithe spirit (Bruno Ganz), in whom one may detect certain biographical parallels with Wenders, and Cassiel of the melancholy countenance (Otto Sander) are but two of a host of angels one recognises in the course of the film. They know this place from time immemorial, and they are intimately acquainted with its history. They have few powers of direct intervention, but their gaze and what little influence they

*Tokyo-Ga*: 'a meaningless activity in a confined space ...'



do have is benign. Unseen to all but the young at heart (children and cinema-goers), they can slip through the Wall as a fairy-tale prince might slip through a hedge of briars. They overhear the thoughts of the people of Berlin and have access to their innermost desires.

Far from repelling them, however, these insights into human emotions merely excite the angels to feel the physical constraints and simple pleasures of life on earth themselves. The film bursts momentarily into colour tones whenever Daniel comes close to human experience; and in the end, when he has finally shed his angelic shroud, it celebrates the fact by changing from black and white to colour completely.

Wenders weaves a further strand into his story—the making of a film about Berlin's Nazi past—and wittily exploits the added levels of time and place this affords him. Peter Falk appears as himself, playing the role of an American actor and slipping between two worlds: between modern Berlin and the film set, between present and past. Arriving by air, like the angels, he provides a commentary on the film itself, holding up a mirror to events and intervening in the action as a pivot about which the story often turns. He senses the presence of the angels, without being able to see them, ultimately disclosing that he is a former angel himself.

Wenders reveals his indebtedness to Resnais and Tarkovsky on a number of occasions: in the use of colour changes to denote changes of viewpoint; in the use of documentary material and film in film to create shifts in time; in the aesthetic of ruin, and even in specific images, such as the solitary tree surrounded by water.

If the original German title, *Der Himmel über Berlin* ('The Heavens over Berlin'), defines the perspective of the angels and the director, the English title, *Wings of Desire*, suggests the aspirations of mortals and angels alike to be united on a plane of common experience. The main thread running through the film, about which all the other strands are woven, is spun in the form of a simple love story, told in nothing less than fairy-tale form. Through a gateway one suddenly catches a magical glimpse of an elephant and a circus in the heart of the city. In the arena is the trapeze artist Marion (Solveig Dommartin), rehearsing for her final performance. An elfin creature with feathered wings on her back, she is meant to fly through the air like an angel herself. Daniel observes her and senses the first stirrings of desire, and for a moment the screen is flushed with colour.

After the final performance, Marion remains behind in Berlin and bids farewell to the circus—the Circus Alekan. Alekan, as it happens, is also the name of the film's director of photography, the same Henri Alekan who stood behind the camera in 1946 shooting Jean Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast*. Wenders

film, like Cocteau's, tells a story of metamorphosis and redemption through love. Daniel's transformation to human form is accomplished through his love for Marion. On becoming mortal, he discovers the visual and tactile splendours about him, enjoys the first warming cup of coffee, the simple pleasure of rubbing his hands together in cold weather. As in any good fairy tale, however, Daniel and Marion must lose and find each other again. When they are finally reunited, one hears the words 'es war einmal . . .', which are both the German equivalent of 'once upon a time . . .' and the German title of Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête*.

Cocteau dedicated his film to those who had preserved a breath of childlike freshness and those who were weary of what was commonly known as 'real life'. In Wenders' film too it is the young at heart who have access to the angels and to the simple joys of life. The film is framed by a handwritten epigram, beginning 'When the child was a child . . .', and recurring with various endings that seek to depict a child's innocent vision of the world. The words and the preoccupation with childhood experience reveal the influence of Peter Handke, who collaborated with Wenders on the screenplay.

Where in *Tokyo-Ga* Wenders was in danger of succumbing to the fascination of the images, here he puts his achievement at risk with an excess of words. The text, often mannered, yet exerting its own hypnotic seduction when spoken to the pictures, threatens to inflate the love story into something pretentious and to obscure the essential simplicity of its happy end. The lightness and wit with which the simple things in life are rediscovered in actions and taut dialogue are here weighed down with literary ballast. The journey through space and time is ultimately more important to Wenders than the destination itself, as the final written words reveal: 'to be continued'.

## Bagdad Café

After enjoying a measure of international success with his previous venture into comedy (*Sugarbaby*, 1984), Percy Adlon sets out in *Bagdad Café* (formerly *Out of Rosenheim*, 1987) to explore the confrontation of provincial Bavaria with a desert outpost in the American West. Jasmin Münchgstetter (a deliberate mouthful of a name), a middle-aged middle-class German tourist of more than ample proportions (played by Marianne Sägebrecth of *Sugarbaby* fame), parts company with her husband on the highway in the middle of nowhere and struggles off with her suitcase in search of the nearest settlement. She lands in a place called Bagdad, which consists of no more than a rundown café-motel and filling station, and a motley bunch of desert flowers, including Brenda (CCH Pounder), the hard-headed black girl who runs the place with her idle family; Rudy Cox (a rare appearance by Jack Palance), a former set-painter in Hollywood who now lives in a caravan in the desert and paints his own canvases; Debbie, a tattoo artist, who caters to the needs of passing truck-drivers; and a pigtailed Indian sheriff.

Jasmin rents a room at the motel and discovers to her dismay that she has taken the wrong suitcase—the one containing her husband's belongings and a box of magic tricks. She resolves to stay in Bagdad, which does not please Brenda, who senses that the newcomer from Rosenheim will disturb their sleepy way of life. Sure enough, Jasmin is soon busily tidying up the place, taking care of the children, helping out in the coffee shop and generally concerning herself with things that are none of her business.

Rudy Cox discovers her attractions

*Wings of Desire*: from left, Wim Wenders, Peter Falk, Henri Alekan.



and begins to paint a series of portraits of Jasmin that depict her holding various pieces of fruit and in a state of progressive *déshabille*. Meanwhile Jasmin begins to practise the magic tricks she has found in her luggage. Slowly Brenda's antagonism towards

her melts, and the pair soon have a most successful show running in the coffee bar that attracts the truck-drivers from miles around—until the sheriff informs Jasmin one day that her permit has expired and she must leave...

Those acquainted with the German cinema since its renaissance in the 60s may feel that they have been here before, at least as far as the topography is concerned. The American highway through the desert, the solitary filling station by the roadside, the deep blue sky and the crystal clear air obviously exercise a romantic fascination on German directors. Adlon exploits the atmospheric clichés with ample use of coloured filters, orange sunsets and tilted cameras. But the film becomes stuck in the very clichés it purports to parody: the Bavarian native costume and the snuff, the German sense of order and tidiness, and mutual distaste for foreign coffee. The opposition between Brenda and Jasmin, which is the true motor of the film, is all too glibly resolved. What is more, the jokes and situations, on which a film of this kind depends, are rarely genuinely comical. They soon become laboured and overplayed. In the end, the incidental wit of Wenders' *Wings of Desire* proves more fleet-footed than Adlon's premeditated attempt at comedy.

On 15 January, Bavarian Film Prizes were awarded in Munich to the following: Lucki Stipetic for production (*Cobra Verde*); Wim Wenders for direction (*Der Himmel über Berlin*); Eleonora and Percy Adlon for screenplay (*Out of Rosenheim, now Bagdad Café*). ■

Bagdad Café: CCH Pounder.



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# What's wrong with this picture?

Or,  
why were there  
no more  
André Antoine  
films after  
*L'Arlésienne*?

**BARRY SALT**

This is certainly a good-looking picture, like most of the images in André Antoine's films, for the man had long experience as a photographer, having taken an immense number of stills as reference material for his stage productions. But then we have to ask how this picture fits into the flow of shots in the film. This is actually the first shot of a scene near the beginning of *L'Arlésienne*, and it is the point at which the narrative gets under way, just after the main characters have been introduced. Frédéric, the protagonist, has been given an errand by his widowed mother (standing foreground) as he rides off (middle distance) from the stables of their farm.

By 1920, most French film-makers would have used some cutting to closer shots in the exchange between mother and son, but Antoine, whose 1919 film *La Terre* was still constructed on the primitive 'one scene—one shot' basis, had only just learned about this, and tended to relapse into the older style of covering all the action in one shot taken from a distance, as he does here. Then he suddenly remembers what he has been told about cutting to different angles, or someone on the crew reminds him, and we get a shot of Frédéric's simple-minded brother, 'L'Innocent',



Frédéric has been given an errand by his widowed mother...

calling out 'Take me with you, Frédéric.' But where is L'Innocent standing? He cannot be recognised anywhere in the first shot, and it is impossible to tell where he is from any reaction given by the tiny figure of Frédéric as he rides away after a cut back to the first set-up.

In fact it was only after careful repeated examination of the print that I could work out that the little brother is actually in the frame in the first shot, as a nearly invisible dot, sitting on a rock under a tree at the top right of the main shot, rather than somewhere behind the wall at the left of the picture, as I assumed with puzzlement on first seeing the film. Not a good beginning to a major film production, even in France back in 1921.

Antoine had established himself as one of the most important figures in French theatre from 1887 when he set up the Théâtre Libre, and he made his name by following two principles. The first was the staging of large numbers of new plays, and the second was the thoroughgoing application of the ideas that Zola had put forward in his essay 'Le Naturalisme au Théâtre' (1881) and other writings, and indeed had also demonstrated when collaborating in the staging of his novels *L'Assommoir* and *Nana* in 1879 and 1881. But after long

Where is L'Innocent standing as he calls after his brother?



—Frédéric, emmène-moi!

The old lady returns to the farm, but has her back to it at the key moment.



— Le voilà donc encore, ce vieux Castelet que je n'ai pas vu depuis tant d'années!



— Je le crois bien! Ici, les bergeries... là-bas, la magnanerie et les hangars.

success pursuing these ideas, in 1914 Antoine was forced into film-making in an attempt to recoup the large sums of money that his productions at the Théâtre National de l'Odéon had lost in the preceding several years. He quickly became fascinated by the medium, and in 1916 wrote to a friend, 'For some weeks I have been up to my neck in the cinema. It is not as horrible as one thinks, and is even probably a new art that is rising up, which will regale our children, but there is not enough time to adapt myself to it, and I will be satisfied to draw from it some resources which basically the theatre could not provide me.' What he meant was that film made possible an even more detailed realism (or naturalism) than he had been exploiting in the theatre, and this led to his determination to film as much as possible on location.

This is the feature of *L'Arlésienne* and his other films that makes them more interesting now than they were at the time, for they reproduce for us the look of a world that has vanished for ever. On the other hand, however, Antoine did not really understand the true nature of editing in the cinema. He tended to think of it as just something that could make instantaneous scene changes in a way that was impossible in the theatre: 'The cinema can do everything! It is a magician! It is at the same time the theatre and the novel, conversation and painting! And nature, old man! The cinema satisfies all our curiosities, all our taste for speed, and this desire for changes that the fastest revolving stages cannot give us. At the cinema, you are in Paris; one second later, in San Francisco.'

Although by the time he made *L'Arlésienne* Antoine had heard about editing, he did not properly understand the way it worked. The real power of cutting in the standard form of cinema ('mainstream continuity cinema' or 'classical cinema') which had recently been developed in America, and which was just beginning to be assimilated by the French film industry at the end of the First World War, lay in the way it made possible the omission of the boring bits of action within scenes that did not contribute to the story, and also the way it was able to emphasise the emotional interplay between characters by careful control of the camera placement. Close examination of *L'Arlésienne* shows that Antoine covered every inch of his actors' movements over the ground within the scenes when he shot the film, whereas any experienced French film-maker, even at that date, would have been able to arrange camera set-ups, and exits and entrances from the frame, to get a character from A to B quickly.

This frequently put the editor of *L'Arlésienne* in an impossible position when trying to speed up the action by cutting out the bits irrelevant to the narrative. At one point he even had to resort to a version of the legendary joke of film-makers with continuity problems, 'Oh, well, we'll just have to cut to the cat'—in this case, a pointless insert shot of a rooster put in to shorten the hero's passage from background to foreground in a scene near the end of the film.

Even after his film career had ended in 1923, Antoine was still insisting that the only best way to film would be to use multiple cameras. 'It must be possible to shoot the scenes with five or six operators. To make the actors work under the cross-fire of the lenses, and know how to select successively the best gestures, the truest expressions. This is elementary, this is logical.' But of course, if this had been done, it would have forced the whole scene to run in real time, and limited the possible angles chosen, through the necessity of keeping the cameras out of each other's field of view, as everyone found out several years later at the beginning of the sound cinema, when they were forced into it by technical constraints. Antoine's collaborators in the cinema dimly realised what was wrong with his approach, but they were obviously unable to explain it properly to him, presumably because they had not yet fully understood the newly developed standard form of cinema themselves.

Although Antoine had two cameramen on *L'Arlésienne*, it seems that they were not used to get two angles simultaneously on the scenes, but just to shoot side by side to obtain a second negative for foreign distribution, as the Americans had been doing for several years. (There is a contemporary sketch proving this.) Nevertheless, it is possible that some scenes of Antoine's *L'Hirondelle et la Mésange*, made after *L'Arlésienne* but never released by Pathé (see *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Summer 1984), may have been shot with two cameras simultaneously. This would explain the strange cuts from one angle to another angle at 90 degrees to the first, but at the same camera distance, on some of the group scenes.

Unfortunately, these cuts in *L'Hirondelle et la Mésange* show nothing that was not equally visible from the first angle, and so forcibly disprove the mistaken theory of film-making that Antoine clung to. Likewise, in *L'Arlésienne*, Antoine's literal-minded attitude to the reproduction of reality by the cinema is surely behind the clumsiness of his scene dissection: for instance in the scene in which an old relative makes an emotional return to

the farm after many years and is placed with her back to the farm, looking away from it at the moment that she recognises it. When she names the buildings—sheepfolds, silkworm shed, barns—we are not shown them, nor do we get a front view of her face to show her emotion. (In the same scene in Daudet's play, both the old woman and the buildings are in view to the audience at the same time.)

In fact the adaptation André Antoine made of Alphonse Daudet's play for the film is a rather clumsy piece of work, and is basically carried out by putting on the screen events that are related in the play as having taken place before the action started, or that take place off-stage during it. Daudet had carpentered *L'Arlésienne* after the standard nineteenth-century model of the 'well-made play', using material from stories in his *Lettres de Mon Moulin*, principally from the one also called *L'Arlésienne*. In the play, this brief story of the infatuation of the son of a farm with the girl from Arles, the discovery that she was already another man's mistress, and his eventual suicide, was contrasted with the effects of the old shepherd Balthazar's long-forsworn illicit love, and also paralleled with the struggle of M Soguain's goat against her fated death, which is referred to at various points in the play by L'Innocent and Balthazar.

Antoine retains the final ironic quotation from *Le Chèvre de M Seguin*, but eliminates the telling of the significant part of the story near the beginning of the play, so destroying Daudet's effect. In the play, the comic relief derived from *Tartarin de Tarascon* is also cleverly integrated, and indeed the whole vehicle held the stage in France for several decades. But in the film these parallel themes are partially lost, and what is left does more to hold up the action than illuminate it. Even the dramatic effects of Daudet's stage directions are ignored. The first half of the second act, in which Frédéric is emotionally devastated and adrift, is described in the play text as being set on the flat marshy Camargue plain by the lake of Vaccarès, with its 'immense, empty horizon'. This paralleling of Nature and dramatic action of the best Zolaesque variety is thrown away in the film, however, despite Antoine's insistence on real locations.

As well as the exteriors, some of the interior scenes of *L'Arlésienne* were shot on location; the results were mixed. One positive result is that we can still see what a few rooms in a few buildings from the Arles region looked like in 1921. On the negative side, however, these interiors are rather crudely lit with the extra lights put in by L.H.

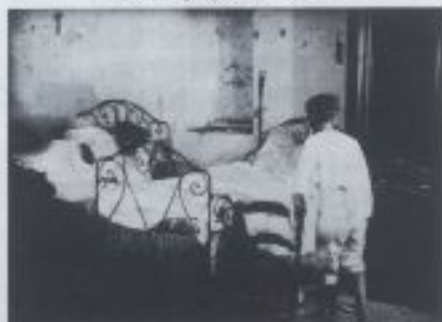
Burel to get an exposure; in one case making nonsense of the important fact that the scene was supposed to be taking place in the middle of the night. At this date, Burel was far from being the master cameraman he eventually became, as is also shown by the major scene that was shot in the studio, and not on location. Here the lighting is much rougher than the best film lighting of the period, as can be seen in the frame still of the final moment of the scene which had ended the second act of the play.

Frédéri has just announced that he will give up the girl from Arles, and marry the farm girl his parents had wanted him to marry all long, and then we get the old-fashioned theatrical posed 'Tableau-Curtain' (sorry, 'Fade-out!'). And consider also the cheap look of the set. One might add that such faults are common enough in other French films of the period, and are just some of the reasons that these films could not break into the American market in the 20s.

We are always told that Antoine introduced a new realism and restraint in acting into the theatre, which may be true, but a glance at a couple of frames from *L'Arlésienne* should suggest that he was far from being up to date with the point film acting had reached in 1921. Gabriel de Gravonne, as Frédéric, gives a grotesquely exaggerated performance, which has a certain interest as an indication of what was presumably still acceptable at that date from a *jeune premier* on the European stage (and is somewhat similar to the embarrassing performance of Gustav Frölich in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*), and Lucienne Breval, the opera singer, in the other main part of his mother, periodically lives down to the traditional idea of opera acting. The rest of the cast do fairly well by the standards of continental film acting of the time, but was Antoine directing the actors, or wasn't he? Altogether, it is not surprising that Pathé took his camera away from him after they had given him one more chance on *L'Hirondelle et la Mésange*.

Despite these faults, enough of the strong original material from Daudet's play survives in passable form to make *L'Arlésienne* bear reseeing, but it seems to me that André Antoine's truly valuable legacy to the cinema was a man he had employed to direct stage productions at his theatres earlier in the century; namely, Maurice Tourneur. For it was actually Tourneur, in the films he made during the First World War in America, who pushed restraint and the precise control of the detail in film acting into new regions inaccessible to Antoine himself. ■

Crude lighting of a night scene and of the group shot which ends the play's second act.



Gabriel de Gravonne, an exaggerated Frédéric. Lucienne Breval.





## Peter Pan in the Forbidden City

*The Last Emperor*/David Wilson

'Is it true I can do anything I like?' The child's remark is half innocent, half aware of the corruptions of power—and perhaps the key to Bertolucci's interpretation of the life of the last Emperor of China. Aisin-Gioro Pu Yi was, literally, His Majesty the Child. Installed on the Dragon Throne in 1908 at the age of three, festooned by stepmothers, tutors, courtiers and an army of eunuchs (1,600 of them), the child emperor was omnipotent. In his confessional autobiography written—or ghosted—during the period of his rehabilitation by the Chinese Communist Party, Pu Yi describes a meal that was laid out for him each day in the Mind Nurture Palace. From Duck of Triple Delight to Ancestor Meat Soup, the menu occupies a page of text. But the food was not for eating; it was pure display, a hieratic ritual of the Ch'ing dynasty court.

This all-powerful monarch, Son of Heaven and Lord of Ten Thousand Years, absolute ruler of an empire which stretched from Siberia to Burma, ended his days as a gardener in the Beijing Botanical Gardens. Was this a fall from grace, of spectacular dimensions? Not according to the Chinese, who congratulated Bertolucci on the screenplay (by Mark Peploe and the director, with earlier collaboration by the late Enzo Ungari) for its account of Pu Yi's transformation from imperial dragon to model citizen of the People's Republic, just one face among the hundreds of cyclists waiting at a traffic light on their way to work.

Bertolucci himself sees *The Last Emperor* (Columbia) as a journey from darkness into light, where his previous

films travelled from light to dark. So the film begins, immediately interposing its moral and political thematic, with that point in Pu Yi's life when he tried to end it, by cutting his wrists in a railway station washroom on the Sino-Soviet border. In one of those coded compositions that have become a characterising feature of Bertolucci's cinema, the camera closes on the red circle of blood. Pu Yi is saved, though, as he is to be 'saved' by ten years of political re-education.

It is this journey into light which determines the film's structure, and is reflected in the gradations of its style. As Pu Yi responds to his interrogator and to his mentor, the prison governor (played, with a nice irony, by China's Deputy Minister of Culture, Ying Ruocheng), we see a version of his extraordinary life. First, and at length, the oppressive pageant of the Manchu court. Great blocks of spectacle fill the screen as Vittorio Storaro's camera sweeps and swoops through the vast courtyards and the interior maze of the Forbidden City, or describes slow parabolas round the massed ranks of kowtowing courtiers. This is breathtaking cinema, its calculated grandiosity recalling, on a magnified scale, the geometrical architecture of *The Conformist*. As one bravura sequence follows another (crowds scurrying to turn their faces to the walls as their child emperor is carried through the streets; the venerable Empress Dowager propped up on her mammoth bed with a Pekinese dog at her feet), the film runs the risk, which it does not entirely avoid, of offering a surfeit of spectacle.

But this is not of course mere spectacle, which for all its pomp and circumstance would soon become a visual tautology. What we have here is that familiar Bertolucci strategy of playing one perception against another, as Pu Yi's recollections are mediated by the director's formal commentary on them, and by the spectator's own shifting interpretation of these scenes.

Typically, in this first section, the camera will describe a line across a crowded scene before moving slightly off the horizontal. The angularity alerts us to a point of view, and as a formal device it is supported by the elaborate colour coding of Storaro's lighting. The early sequences in the palace are suffused in yellow and red (the yellow tiles evidently reminding Bertolucci of his birthplace, Parma). Cocooned in ritual, shielded from the forbidden world outside the Forbidden City, Pu Yi is a prisoner of this imperial pageant. The sense of confinement is nowhere better conveyed than in a vast open space as the boy, in extreme long shot, despairingly calls after his wet nurse when she is dismissed from the palace.

Even when the dynasty is forced to abdicate after the 1911 revolution, life within the Forbidden City continues as, in Pu Yi's words, 'a theatre without an audience'. A little light is let in with the arrival of a foreign tutor (Peter O'Toole, with a faltering Scottish accent but otherwise striking an agreeable balance between awe and canniness), who introduces his charge to some of the mysteries of the Occident. As Pu Yi emerges into adulthood, he also emerges tentatively out of the shadows cast by the towering walls of his entrapment. But not beyond them: confronted by a barred gate as he tries to leave the city, he hurls his pet white mouse against it.

Pu Yi as victim, then? We should know by now that Bertolucci could not entertain so reductive a view, and there have already been qualifying indications. The omnipotent child is not averse to the seductions of power. When even a cricket crawls from its box to kowtow to him, it is nothing for him to prove his power as emperor by obliging a Chinese tutor to drink green ink. The shade of Freud is never far from Bertolucci's films. It haunted *The Conformist*, and it is that film's dark obsessions which the central section of *The Last Emperor* most recalls.

Denied real power as a child by a surfeit of its trappings, Pu Yi as an adult (the excellent John Lone) is traduced into believing that he has found it when he is installed by the Japanese as puppet emperor of their client state of Manchukuo. With a retinue of camels and black limousines, the emperor's second coronation is enacted on a dusty plain in a replica of the Forbidden City's Temple of Heaven—and in the middle of nowhere. The power is

illusory, an illusion reflected by the lighting and the decor throughout this part of the film. Cold greys and browns predominate, as Pu Yi's strings are pulled by the Japanese and his wife (Joan Chen) is seduced into opium addiction by a sinister temptress called Eastern Jewel (Maggie Han).

This agent of the dark, first seen in a startling brown leather flying suit, remains a mysterious figure. The focus hereabouts is blurred, as though the film were itself being seduced by its portrait of decadence: there is more than a touch of 1930s Hollywood *Chinoiserie* in the steamy shadows of the opium-smoking scenes. A similar sense of haste is evident in the relatively brief account of Pu Yi's final emergence into the light, with the result that we are not quite persuaded, as Bertolucci clearly means to persuade us, of the emperor's absorption into the collective

consciousness of the Chinese people. The Cultural Revolution, presented as a piece of street theatre performed by fresh-faced students, and unpersuasively bringing on Pu Yi from the wings to protest about the prison governor's appearance in a parade of dunce-capped revisionists, looks like a westerner's view of these somewhat less anodyne events. And the final sequence, as the gardener Pu Yi revisits the Forbidden City and 'discovers' his childhood cricket behind the throne to prove to a red-necked boy that he was indeed the emperor, is astonishingly sentimental. The full-circle schematism of this scene is an indication of the film's ultimate failure to resolve its own contradictions. Not for the first time in Bertolucci's work, the parts do not quite build into a whole, even when that whole is built on shifting perspectives. But they are magnificent. □

sees her family fail and her hopes for her difficult children turn to despair. As these children, the extraordinary John Malkovich (Tom) and Karen Allen (Laura), submit to a procession of tyrannies which lead up to the worst, the pathetic little dinner party for the Gentleman Caller, after which the family falls to bits, and the apartment walls, instead of caving in, seem to blow outwards as everyone is whirled apart.

John Malkovich is now probably America's most gifted and resourceful young actor. Because he is, he can get away in this resoundingly WASP part with his somewhat feral Slavic looks and a manner of speaking which is as idiosyncratically contemporary as Brando's was in his own time. One of the finest sequences of the film belongs to Karen Allen and to James Naughton, the Gentleman Caller. As he attempts to bring her out into the light a little, we are made to feel the small flame of hope that flickers up in her breast for a few moments. In Naughton, who along with Woodward and Allen was in the Williamstown production (Tom was first played there by John Sayles), there is no physical suggestion of the once insolent high school hero, with a face now shading, or fading, into doubt and anonymity. This robust young man with his glistening, stiff hair and strong mouth might very well go on to be the City's mayor or the State's senator. Nor do you feel, when watching Naughton, the dread spectre of premature middle-age which presumably Tom is meant to see in his friend's face, and from which he will run away. But Naughton's playing is so delicate, you accept how well set up he looks. He must still be working out at the gym.

Tennessee Williams' reputation seems today to be somehow unrelated to his plays—to the full weight, you might say, of the Collected Works in the great

## His master's voice

*The Glass Menagerie*/James Ivory

In 1985, when Paul Newman saw the Williamstown Theater Festival production of *The Glass Menagerie* with his wife Joanne Woodward as Amanda and Karen Allen as Laura, he says he thought it '... shameful not to have a permanent record of their performance in this great play.' Thus his subsequent decision to film the production was both a husband's act of homage to an actress wife's art, and a director's act of homage to a playwright whose own art has lately been obscured by the lurid and sometimes squalid circumstances of his last years, death, and the ensuing scramble of interested parties for the material things he left behind: copyrights, manuscripts, letters, journals, real estate, cash, stocks and bonds. There have been very few occasions where a husband/wife-director/star team have put together something so solidly realised as this latest version on film of Williams' debut play, which was first seen on Broadway in 1946 in a legendary production starring Laurette Taylor, with 'theme' music—as it used to be credited—by Paul Bowles.

From the inception of his film (Columbia), Newman had the straightforward and sensible idea of letting the text of the play itself stand as his screenplay, refusing to cut or refurbish, to 'open out' or to 'update'. Yet, in spite of these proclaimed intentions, in spite of the beauty of what he has put before audiences through this method, he has induced much carping for not showing Laura at her typewriting school or Tom in his warehouse and so on. In the genteelly shabby St Louis apartment created by Tony Walton, in which the walls seem to lean over the characters like stifling presences about to come

down in a smothering embrace, the Wingfield family and their Gentleman Caller attempt to work out one of those fearful family destinies from which all serious twentieth-century American dramas derive.

At the set's dun-coloured centre, like a kind of diabolically driven perpetual motion and chatter machine, is Woodward's Southern belle. She has got this type of middle-aged, middle-class American woman exactly: a creature put on this earth to live for a man, and after that, his family; a non-stop talker, a one-track mind, she uses every manipulative weapon that guile or accident places in her pretty, well-cared-for little hand. Maddening, gallant, touching, and finally tragic, Woodward's Amanda

*The Glass Menagerie*: Karen Allen, Joanne Woodward, John Malkovich.



## Breaking news Wall Street & Broadcast News Sean French

scales which are thought to measure up worth. Every actress wants to play Blanche before she dies, and there are plenty of productions of his early plays, even if the later ones go disdained and unperformed. He's far more popular with audiences than the other Immortal, Eugene O'Neill. And yet, despite two decades of hits which are universally admired, his status is argued, his accomplishments derided, and the void which is Serious Theatre, at least in New York, can now only be filled by revivals, or the occasional British import. Apparently, no one wishes he were still around (he'd be 77), unless it's actors.

It is astonishing to read Mary McCarthy's assessment of his talent in her collection of theatre pieces called *Sights and Spectacles, 1937-1958*. Distrusting the success of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, she calls the play a mere episode in his career, a career which itself had '... the tinny quality of a musical romance.' His work reeked of literary ambition, she wrote, and it was impossible to witness one of his plays (*Streetcar* was only the second) without becoming aware of the pervading smell of careerism. When Williams, in an interview, referred to himself as '... that most common American phenomenon, the rootless, wandering writer,' she wondered if that was '... a wholly fitting description of a talent which is as rooted in the American pay-dirt as a stout and tenacious carrot.'

McCarthy, like other left-wing critics then, also hated the sort of middle-brow theatre of which Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and William Inge were the principal villains. They were not radical enough. They did not advance the art. And critics today, comfortably middle-class themselves and no longer living in a radical age, have sometimes found similar fault with Newman's film. It does not go far enough, they write. But where was it to go? And in what way has this film, which is the best *Menagerie* I have ever seen on stage or screen, failed to capture the full world of Williams' imagination? More theatrical in its style than most films dare to be today, more careful to evoke correctly the spirit and the images of the past so that the author's true voice may yet be heard again, this film reveals a side of the director—a tenderness?—which as a leading man we have not so clearly glimpsed before.

Richard Ellmann, in his life of Oscar Wilde, sums up the earlier dramatist in the book's last paragraph. He might have been writing about Williams: 'Now beyond the reach of scandal, his best writings validated by time, he comes before us still, a towering figure, laughing and weeping, with parables and paradoxes, so generous, so amusing, and so right.' Could this not be seen to apply in part to Newman and Woodward's film, like its scriptwriter so generous, so amusing, and so right? □

As Ronald Reagan sits out the last lame months of his presidency, one of the old movie actor's principal regrets may well be the brevity of the influence that the bullish early optimism of his presidency exerted on Hollywood. It now seems a long time ago that Clint Eastwood's *Heartbreak Ridge* implausibly but consolingly suggested that the invasion of Grenada was a glorious victory that wiped out the humiliations of Vietnam and Korea. Such impulses have proved ephemeral. The latest *Rambo* film is set in Afghanistan (with John Rambo fighting alongside the anti-Soviet freedom fighters), but it is reported that, in the light of recent developments, the producers are redubbing—and depoliticising—the film in order to substitute the name of an imaginary locale for a country that seems on the verge of no longer being oppressed by the red hordes.

One of the best demonstrations of America's changed mood has been the recent box-office successes of Oliver Stone's *Wall Street* and James L. Brooks' *Broadcast News* (both Fox). It's good to feel bad about America again. Oliver Stone's revisionist version of the Vietnam War in *Platoon* once seemed so controversial that for years it proved impossible to finance. Now, emboldened by his Oscar, Oliver Stone has gone much further and brought his disenchantment on to the American main-

land and almost up to the present day. The subject is New York's booming stock market in the days before it was brought to an end first by the arrest of Ivan Boesky for insider dealing and then by the crash of last October.

Stone sees New York's bull market much as he saw the battlefields of Vietnam. The best parts of *Platoon* were when he drew on his own combat experience to show the physical chaos of battle, the difficulty in understanding what anyone is saying, where an attack is coming from. In *Wall Street*, Robert Richardson's camera prowls around the dealer floor as if it were a war zone. As in *Platoon*, we experience moral chaos physically. The plot is almost identical in the two films: young men, both played by Charlie Sheen, are torn between a good and a bad man. Both end with the young man turning on the bad man and destroying him.

The problem with the film lies just where Oliver Stone wants us to take it most seriously: as an indictment of the Wall Street system. The story is a modern fable, 'The Dirty Secret of My Success', and one assumes that the young hero is called Bud Fox as a sly reference to the recent acceptable face of yuppie greed, Michael J. Fox. The ruthless young dealer, Bud, is desperate to get rich and he becomes a gatherer of illegal intelligence for the insider dealer, Gordon Gekko. He only repents when faced with a ludicrous moral *reductio ad absurdum*: the hostile takeover and dismantlement of his own father's airline business. Stone's *j'accuse* is confused at its very heart: is it the system itself or the abuse of the system that is wrong?

Oliver Stone pretends to be a moralist but at his best he's really a sort of Darwinist. What really interests him is the battle for survival. The quintessential Stone hero is Tony Montana, as played by Al Pacino, in *Scarface*, the film he wrote for Brian DePalma. Montana is Florida's version of Richard III, a psychopathic Cuban émigré who murders his way to the top of a Miami drug empire. Pacino's extraordinary performance ignites the film, and there is no attempt to moralise, rather, a recognition that he is the strongest ant on the hill.

The real energy of *Wall Street* lies in the character of Gordon Gekko. As played by Michael Douglas, Gekko is based as much on the Wicked Witch of the West as on Ivan Boesky. Fox first visits him in his plate-glass eyrie on his birthday and finds him chewing up companies, discoursing on the pleasures of power and announcing that 'lunch is

Wall Street: Michael Douglas.



## FILM REVIEWS

for wimps' while feeding his birthday cards into a shredder. Douglas has wonderful fun with the role, displaying the acquisitive glee of a man who finds it all too easy to profit from the weakness and stupidity of others. His moral world is simple: 'If you're not inside, you're outside.'

Unfortunately, Stone then gives him disappointingly little to do. He delivers a speech to some shareholders closely echoing Boesky's aspiration to 'make people feel good about greed.' He hires Bud Fox to do some legwork for him. Then, in the end, he proves disappointingly easy to bring down, in a stratagem much like that at the climax of *Trading Places*.

However, the film benefits enormously from shrewd casting. On paper the relationship between Bud and his father would seem intolerably sentimental. But Bud's father is played by Charlie Sheen's real father, Martin, and their scenes gain from the authenticity of the bond between them. Darien (Daryl Hannah) is another half-thought-out character, an impossibly trendy interior designer, who picks Bud up when he's rich, decorates his apartment in fashionably post-punk style, and then drops him when he's on the slide. But, having played a mermaid, an android, Steve Martin's fantasy woman in *Roxanne*, Hannah is perfect at playing someone who isn't quite real, a cultural and corporate acquisition, rather than a woman—an embodiment of the sort of art that flatters power.

In *Broadcast News* the performances are so good they almost seduce you away from seeing what the film is really about. It caused a great stir in America because it was taken as a devastating exposé of the much-respected tv news producers and presenters. It is, of course, nothing of the kind. At the heart of the film is an old-fashioned Hollywood triangle: Aaron Altman (Albert Brooks) is a brilliant but depressed reporter with no screen charisma. 'If insecurity and desperation were a turn on,' he says, 'wouldn't this be a great world.' Tom Grunick (William Hurt) is the opposite, an empty-headed aspirant anchorman floating inevitably to the top. Jane Craig (Holly Hunter) is a talented, idealistic news producer, with a neurotic temperament and a delightful Southern accent.

The characterisation in James L. Brooks' script is as rigid as that in the tv situation comedies where he learned his trade. Albert Brooks may be witty, intelligent and handsome, but we know he can't get the girl because he's playing the Eddie Bracken character. (In fact, in *Miracle of Morgan's Creek* Preston Sturges actually played with the convention and allowed Bracken to get Betty Hutton.) Similarly, the character of Jane Craig is founded entirely on the reassuring convention that successful career women are by



*Broadcast News*: Albert Brooks and TV image of William Hurt.

definition less happy than other women—or men for that matter. But Albert Brooks and Holly Hunter perform with such vitality, such comic neuroticism, that they at least blur the edges of their stereotypes.

The most interesting character is Grunick, who is designed to represent all that is superficial in the television age. The crux of the film is where he fakes a tear in a filmed interview in order to display his own humanity. As a character, Grunick is not much of an advance on the vain, ignorant anchorman from the tv news office in the *Mary Tyler Moore Show* (of which Brooks was one of the creators). But where most actors would have overplayed Grunick as a mercurial wheeler-dealer, William Hurt turns him into an extraordinary modern villain, passive and almost passionless. He drifts around the newsroom feeding off the energy of those around him. His attraction to Jane's electric vitality is marvellously conveyed—far more convincingly than hers to him.

On the air, Grunick is an empty vessel into which information is poured via his earpiece to emerge from his mouth without an intermediate step. The most exciting, and sexiest, sequence in the film is where Jane talks him through an important news broadcast: Grunick knows nothing but emerges onscreen as an authoritative political commentator. He sighs to her afterwards: 'What a feeling it was having you inside my head—like great sex.' Unfortunately, Brooks lets Grunick off the hook at the end by giving him some redeeming qualities. This may make us feel better as we walk out of the cinema but it means that the character is no longer the symbol of small-screen evil he is meant to be.

Most of the satiric bite, therefore, is to be found in the performances. The funniest is by Jack Nicholson (uncredited) as the God of this little world, the network news anchorman. Anyone who saw *Prizzi's Honor* or James L. Brooks' previous film, *Terms of Endearment*, many have wondered whether Nicholson could ever bring his acting style back from over the top, but he has managed it here. His adoption of the bogus gravitas of a Cronkite is in itself a fine satirical achievement.

At least Brooks hasn't just written a love story with a news studio as a background. This film is much more in the mould of *Hill Street Blues* and Brooks' own *Lou Grant*. The drama emerges, along with some good jokes, directly from the mechanics of the job: editing, editorial decisions, network economics. It also shares those programmes' amiable and forgiving attitudes to its own central characters. The film is consistently interesting and entertaining, even at 130 minutes. But compared with other films about broadcasting, like *Network* or *The Ploughman's Lunch*, its critique of the new system doesn't amount to much. After all, the question of whether news anchormen do or don't write all their own material, on which the film hinges, is a peripheral issue. Even *RoboCop*, with its two newscasters giggling as they report ghastly tragedies, has more pointed things to say about television's perception of the world.

However, what *Wall Street* and *Broadcast News* said to America in 1987 was of more political significance than these comparisons would suggest. The point was not that they were not radical enough but that such prominent, commercial films ventured to rock the boat at all. □



*Empire of the Sun*: Christian Bale (Jim).

## E.T. and a half

*Empire of the Sun*/Gilbert Adair

Staying with acquaintances in Paris a few years ago, I fell into conversation with their son, an intelligent little boy of seven and a half, about the current movies he had most enjoyed. The titles he cited were, in the main, dishearteningly predictable: the *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* chronicles, *Battlestar Galactica* and so on. Urged by me to broaden—or rather to curb—his cinematic horizons, he mentioned at last a film that had been doing sellout business in the city, Jamie Uys' South African farce of Coca-colonisation *The Gods Must Be Crazy*. 'And where does that film take place?' I enquired, all innocence. Came the mildly terrifying response: 'On earth.'

Yet, were I to be asked where Steven Spielberg's *Empire of the Sun* (Warner Bros) takes place, I would probably offer the same reply, rather than the more precise but also more confining 'in Japanese-occupied China during the Second World War'.

The difference is that whereas, for my little film buff chum, the phrase clearly reflected his belief in the cinema as a magically untrammelled medium for which his native planet was only one, and perhaps not the most intensely present, of many viable locations, it would be for me an acknowledgment of one director's enduringly, endearingly cosmic sensibility, his unrivalled capacity to retrieve and recreate the earth, for two hours or so, as what it has never truly ceased to be—just another planet rolling through space and open (potentially, at any rate) to visitation from its neighbours. *Empire of the Sun* is not of course a work of science-fiction

(even though based, hardly coincidentally, on a novel by a writer, J. G. Ballard, who happens to be one of the pillars of that genre). But, invested as it has been with the same expectantly premonitory hush that one recalls from the director's previous films, bathed in the same golden, quasi-religious light, one would not be too surprised if some gem-studded gyroscope of a spacecraft were all of a sudden to alight on the internment camp in which most of it is set.

E.T. and the spacecraft of *Close Encounters* may have departed but the world they have left behind has been irreversibly altered, there being a glowing afterimage of congress with the supernatural indelibly overlaid upon it.

In fact, there does occur in the film's narrative an incident distinguishable from science-fiction, of 40s' vintage, only in its unfortunately total and inalterable realness; and an attendant line of dialogue (not found in the novel) that nicely encapsulates its director's tendency to 'spiritualise' technology, even of the most horrendous kind, and harmonise post-Einsteinian physics with a neo-metaphysical system of his own devising.

It is 1945. The film's hero—whose suggestively Stevensonian name of Jim accords with the faintly Long John Silverish character of his befriender, an enigmatic American adventurer called Basie—has been a prisoner of the Japanese for four years, in the course of which he has been transformed from a well-spoken upper middle-class English lad in a school blazer and baggy grey flannel shorts into a precociously go-

getting, Americanised adolescent, the Bilko of *Tenko*. But the war is drawing to its end, the prison camps have been hastily evacuated and the depopulated landscape through which he wanders half-crazed from starvation is abruptly irradiated by an incandescent white flash. It is, as we afterwards learn, the lethally transfiguring glow of the Nagasaki bomb but to Jim in his pre-nuclear innocence it is 'like God taking a photograph'. It may be said too, that, at their most potent, Spielberg's visuals resemble (or seek to resemble) photographs of the world taken by God.

What is most remarkable about *Empire of the Sun*, then, is the almost seamless fashion in which a faithful adaptation—from that awful, corny title onward—of a pretty harrowing English novel in the realist tradition has nevertheless contrived to become a proto-Spielbergian affirmation of faith and optimism in the universe, a completely personal work replete with the God-given 'wholeness' of vision that diametrically opposes his films, for example, to those Bergman chamber dramas of the early 60s in which the deity was famously conspicuous by His absence.

It is its sense of reverence, as well, that differentiates this film from its most obvious cinematic antecedents. Lean, eminently, with whose *Bridge over the River Kwai* and *Lawrence of Arabia* it shares several stylistic tropes and even a few narrative correspondences (the sweeping dolly movements from an individual in the foreground to a vast and hitherto unsuspected expanse of milling humanity; Jim greeting the arrival of the fighters from a barracks roof with the same ecstatic panache as Lawrence swaggering from coach-top to coach-top of a moving train; the echo of *Kwai*'s 'Colonel Bogey' when he strides triumphantly through the American compound to the tune of 'The British Grenadiers'; and, indeed, from that latter film, the whole idea of a protagonist losing sight of the realities of the war, with Jim referring as blissfully to 'our runway' as Guinness's Colonel to 'my bridge'). But also, arguably, the 'epic' Bertolucci, in the suave, spellbound fluidity with which Spielberg films the tableaux of colonial high jinks, as a gleaming Rolls, bearing cute, diminutive Pierrots and Sinbads to a fancy-dress party, forges a wary path through the densely massed populace of Shanghai. (If *The Color Purple* was Spielberg's *Novecento*, this might be regarded as his *Last Emperor*.)

These influences, and others, are visible enough, yet utterly transfigured by Spielberg's own glistening imagery. So that, here, the Lean-like dolly shots at last unashamedly assume the religious implication which was always latently there in any case; the theme of loving one's enemy is now lent a specifically Christian aura; and a beautiful (Chinese?) hymn sung over the film's



credit-titles by a piercingly pure male soprano voice could even be read as a form of *grace*—the grace by which one is granted access to a body of work that, despite adopting an alien, an E.T., as its emblem, has become, paradoxically, the least alienated of contemporary cinema. Amen. □

## Homecoming *Ironweed*/John Pym

It is hard to imagine two more tempting roles for Jack Nicholson and Meryl Streep than those they signed to play in Hector Babenco's version of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *Ironweed* (Palace): Francis Phelan, the tramp who was once a famous baseball player, and Helen Archer, a fallen lady, Francis' down but defiantly not out helpmate. Nicholson's mannerisms, his trademark, seem perfectly suited to those of a hobo, and particularly one as unself-deluding as Francis; and Streep loves nothing better than a real challenge—one costume, a shapeless green coat with a mangy fur trim, an unbecoming cloche hat, showing only a few strands of the famous mane, a hobbled gait and a permanently red nose.

And the lure has, in a sense, paid dividends. In one scene, for example—it's a perishing Halloween in Albany, N.Y., in 1938—a barman (Fred Gwynne) prevails upon the reluctant Helen, a onetime professional singer, to step up and entertain the customers. Streep's transition from uncertainty to confidence as she belts out 'He's My Pal', descending from the platform and coquettishly opening her shabby coat, is a piece of grandstanding few American actresses are capable of. The climax is topped by the revelation that the performance and the surprised applause is in fact only in Helen's imagination: she returns dejectedly to her pal at the bar and the gentlemanly Fred Gwynne gives her a free glass of wine.

As a performer, Nicholson is at his best when his mannerisms—his drawl, his inflections and his facial gymnastics—are not given free rein; when, in short, he is required to play quieter characters, such as the homeless stranger who comes to Jessica Lange's roadside diner in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. Francis Phelan is full of inner reserves, a man of heroic fortitude and endurance. Nicholson has a lived-in face which suits the part; he wears his clothes, which he has made to last, with natural dignity, and his thinning hair is always slicked back; he ties a length of twine round the sole of one of his shoes with the care of a man who knows the value of even a makeshift shoelace.

For many people, the stars will be worth the price of admission. There is, too, the vivid promise of the original

story. *Ironweed* is the third instalment of William Kennedy's 'Albany Cycle' (a fourth, *Quinn's Book*, will be published in the summer), a digressive saga of the Phelan and Quinn families in the 1920s and 30s. *Ironweed* was filmed in Albany, where Kennedy is a professor of English and where he is also, it is reported, something of a civic adornment. The books have put Albany on the literary world map.

What then has gone awry with *Ironweed*, the film, scripted as it is by Kennedy himself and directed by the Argentinian expatriate Hector Babenco, not, on the evidence of *Pixote* and *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, a Hollywood contractman. Perhaps the heart of the matter is the false lure of the original: some books, such as *Ironweed*, despite strong visual incidents and an almost palpable sense of place, just do not translate to the screen. And literary bestsellers with prizes attached are particularly treacherous lures. In the book, time past is indistinguishable from time present; in the film, Babenco falls back on the device of the flashback.

There is also the perennial problem of screen hobos. To be sure, Boudu found himself billeted in a most stogy and unrealistic Parisian household, but somehow an anarchic performance compelled belief in his absolute, singular reality. Nicholson's Francis Phelan lives among typecast tramps, and convincing though he is (indeed as most of the tramps are, but notably Tom Waits, as his simple-minded friend Rudy), there is something about their braziers, their hovels, the charity meals they consume which doesn't ring true—and, unlike Boudu's bourgeois home, was meant to. Where is the frozen breath which indicates truly cold weather?

*Ironweed*, the book, has a great theme: the homecoming of a wanderer, after 22 years, to a wife who has kept

faith with him and also kept the secret which has haunted him all those years—the death of their baby son for which he holds himself responsible. Kennedy's description of this artfully delayed moment is marvellously sustained, with the family at last sitting down to a turkey dinner bought by Francis' wages as a rag-and-bone man's helper. The passage is unforgettable, and all the more so for its lack of sentimentality.

In this scene, the film comes close to achieving the effect of the book, thanks largely to the playing of Carroll Baker as Francis' wife Annie. Unlike Streep's scenes, almost all of which require a taxing and in a sense undisguised physical performance, this one requires only a calm presence suggesting absence of anger and a curious sense of relief and reconciliation. Carroll Baker, all the angles of her face square to Meryl Streep's points, plays the sequence perfectly; and it is hard not to be moved as Francis shows his grandson Danny ('Is he a Phelan or a Quinn grandfather?' the boy asks) how to get his fingers round a baseball.

*Ironweed* is touched with live moments—a long sequence at the beginning with Francis kneeling on a clear late-autumn day beside his son's grave and talking about the view and the comforting proximity of the child's forebears; an encounter before a blazing fire in a library between Helen and an old friend from her respectable days (Laura Esterman), causing Helen to struggle to remember the accents of her youth—but on the whole what chiefly sticks in the mind is the slightly overdressed authenticity of the locations and a certain sort of old-fashioned staginess, notably in the way the glowing white phantoms of Francis' past are periodically conjured up. New readers, hurry to the bookshop. □

*Ironweed*: Meryl Streep and Jack Nicholson.



## Soviet sources

THE FILM FACTORY  
Russian and Soviet Cinema  
in Documents 1896-1939Edited and translated by  
Richard Taylor  
Co-edited by Ian Christie

Routledge/£35

S. M. EISENSTEIN:  
SELECTED WORKS

Vol 1: Writings, 1922-34

Edited and translated by  
Richard Taylor

BFI Indiana/£19.95

Richard Taylor is doing a huge service in broadening knowledge of Soviet cinema, with his series of lively, literate and informed translations. *The Film Factory* is a collection of more than 150 texts by leading Soviet practitioners, theorists and officials, mostly taken from journals and newspapers of the period 1896-1939. Ian Christie's commentary to the collection aims 'not to launch a comprehensive new interpretation of the course of Soviet cinema... [but] to consider what has deformed the western understanding of Soviet cinema, and thus make possible a more objective reading of the documents.'

What has mostly deformed western understanding is precisely lack of primary materials such as this; though *The Film Factory* serves above all to show how admirable an account Jay Leyda gave us in *Kino*—written twenty-eight years ago, when films, documents and Soviet scholarship were a great deal less accessible than they have become today. These new documents alter our perception of detail, make us aware of personalities and films that might have been overlooked; but they do not too dramatically change the received impression of the overall contours.

The Soviet film-makers themselves saw their art in five-year cycles. The first five years, from the nationalisation of the cinema in 1919-20, were a period of discovery and experiment and debate. The second cycle, from *Potemkin* to *Earth*, saw the consolidation and triumph of a revolutionary Soviet cinema. The years 1930-35 began with the sound revolution and ended with the crystallisation of the Stalinist style, exemplified by the definitive promulgation of the dogma of Socialist Realism in 1934.

Rightly, Christie and Taylor demonstrate that things are never quite so clear-cut. For example, Boris Shumyatsky, who headed the film industry from 1930 until his disgrace and liquidation in 1938, has mostly been remembered for crippling Eisenstein's career

through his personal (and anti-Semitic) antagonism; but Ian Christie recalls the positive aspect of his organisational skill in managing the sound revolution. He also stresses that the influences both of progressive regimes (the 20s) or totalitarian tyrannies (the 30s) are always qualified and limited by endemic bureaucratic inefficiency: 'So long as western historians continue to overestimate the effectiveness of centralised state control and propaganda intent, and to underestimate the degrees of improvisation and relative autonomy that have governed its development, they will continue to reproduce a frozen legacy of theory and example.'

*The Film Factory* argues for reconsideration of the achievements in the Stalinist period, demonstrating that there was more variety and more worthwhile activity in the era of the 'art of the millions' than potted history allows. They quote with qualified approval the euphemism (surely ironic?) of a 60s critic who characterised the situation of the later 30s as 'one of artistic freedom, or rather artistic privilege, a privilege obtained from the state in exchange for the acceptance of self-control, i.e. control by professional artistic bodies.'

Can we really attribute the epidemic of premature deaths in the years 1937-41 entirely to lack of self-control? A selective who's who appended to *The Film Factory* records the extinction in this short period of Boris Arvatov (aged 44), Isaak Babel (47), the just-rehabilitated Nikolai Bukharin (50), Sergei Dinamov (38), Vladimir Erofeev (42), Alexei Gan (51), Vladimir Kirshon (36), Alexander Krinitsky (43), Meyerhold (66), Vladimir Nilsen (33), Adrian Piotrovsky (40), Boris Shchukin (45), Shumyatsky (52), Sergei Tretyakov

(47), Trotsky (61), Yakov Yakovlev (43). One or two may have died natural deaths; but hundreds more did not. It was a funny sort of privilege.

The book focuses on the succession of public debates that dominated four and a half decades. Most striking is the sophistication and precocity of the pre-revolutionary writing of Meyerhold, Kuleshov, Mayakovsky and the theatrical director Leonid Andreyev, all of them striving, often with brilliance, to define the specific nature of the cinema that differentiates it from theatre. As early as 1913, Andreyev saw an Edison sound system and anticipated debates that would come years later: 'I do not share this delight in talking cinema. The word is its weakness rather than its strength. The word will merely drive cinema from its unique artistic path and direct it towards the well-trodden, well-rutted and well-worn path of theatre.' Already by 1917 Kuleshov dared call the cinema 'the finest, most widespread and powerful of the arts'; the following year he defined the pre-eminence of montage.

In the early 20s, we see the young artists fired by revolution taking up battle stations: the Kuleshov group with their 'Americanism'; Kozintsev, Trauberg and Yutkevich, the crazy boys of EKKS, combining Russian Eccentricism with elements taken from circus, music hall and Keystone; Eisenstein's notions of the Montage of Attractions and the dominance of film montage; Vertov's rejection of everything but the 'unplayed' cinema. What is most striking about all these positions is their exclusiveness and intolerance: coexistence appeared unthinkable. Viktor Shklovsky dismisses Vertov and the Cine-Eyes: 'Their eyes are situated at an unnatural distance from their brains.' The pitiful late quotations from Vertov's diary show the price he, for one, paid for intransigence.

The period that began in 1929 with the First Five-Year Plan, and saw the coming of sound, the accession of Socialist Realism and the rule of Shumyatsky, effectively subdued this kind of feuding. The debates of the 30s were more official and organisational, concerned with plans to make Soviet cinema self-sufficient and end dependence on imported films; and to fulfil the ideal of a cinema of the millions. *The Film Factory* is admirable in constantly maintaining attention on the economic and organisational realities of the cinema, undermining the persistent western myth that socialist cinemas are somehow emancipated from the burdens of commercial reality. Bureaucrats and film-makers alike are constantly coming back to the problems of money; and the need to create an art for the millions was as much economic as ideological. We are brought firmly face to face with reality in the party resolution proposing 'substituting for vodka such

Poster by the Sternberg Brothers  
for Dziga Vertov's  
*The Eleventh Year* (1928).



sources of income as radio and cinema.' At another level Shklovsky comments, 'Without distribution there is no ideology.' In an apologia for *The General Line*, however, Eisenstein and Alexandrov point up the problematic implications of the position: 'Experiment, intelligible to the millions?'

Even before the arrival of sound the script debate begins. The writers like Mayakovsky and Shklovsky argue for the crucial importance of the script, which no one (except Vertov) was inclined to deny. The trouble is, as ever, the lack of writers. The problem is aggravated with the paranoia of the later 30s, as fewer and fewer writers are prepared to risk commitment on paper; and fewer and fewer scripts are approved by the nervous studio boards. This script crisis seems to be at the centre of the dramatic drop in production that marked the peak Stalinist years: feature production was to fall to a mere nine in 1951.

The atmosphere of the later 30s is reflected as much in the film-makers' Letter to Stalin ('the brilliant Leader of the most outstanding and revolutionary Party') and in Shumyatsky's condemnation of *Bezhin Meadow*, as in the frenzy of *Iskusstvo Kino's* attack on 'the Fascist dogs, Trotsky, Bukharin, Rykov, Yagoda and their hangers-on', who are accused not only of murdering Gorki and Kirov, and planning to kill Lenin, 'wise, great and beloved J. V. Stalin', Molotov, Voroshilov, et al, but into the bargain throwing glass and nails into lubricant, poisoning cattle and firing granaries. The model miner Stakhanov tells the cinema how to organise its affairs; and the cinema cringes at his proletarian wisdom and phenomenal productivity. Pudovkin meanwhile buries his head in theoretical essays on the techniques of acting and of sound.

There are some essential texts here. Lenin's principal *dicta* on cinema are gathered together so that we can finally see exactly in what context he uttered his celebrated assessment of the cinema as 'the most important of the arts'. We also discover his tolerant distaste for the avant-garde. Rarer is Trotsky's highly practical 1924 assessment of the importance of cinema. The Eccentric Manifesto is an irresistibly joyous expression of the emancipation of the heroic period, concluding with a pregnant quotation from the Futurist Marinetti: 'Old men are always wrong even when they are right and the young are always right even when they are wrong.' Another worthwhile maxim is Lunacharsky's laconic 'boring agitation is counter-agitation' (1928).

A speech by Mayakovsky in the course of a debate on the policies of Sovkino, the state film organisation, makes startling reading. His onslaught is unsparing in its fury, naming names and alike belabouring bureaucrats 'suffering from delusions of artistic gran-

deur' and inadequate fellow artists ('The film is bad from start to finish... but that is inevitable with Gardin as director'). What would Mayakovsky have made of the critic Rokotov (who he?) who found it sufficient condemnation of *October* that 'During the fourth and fifth reels there was a loud sound of snoring in the front rows on the left?'

With a book so large (400 double-column pages) we look, perhaps unfairly, for comprehensiveness; and so miss, for example, any documentation on the establishment of the father of film schools, Moscow's All-Union State Institute of Kinematography (VOKU). Equally, the editors—probably thinking it adequately dealt with elsewhere—practically ignore the crucial debate on Socialist Realism which was to leave its mark on Soviet cinema for half a century. The contributions of Gorki, Zhdanov and Lunacharsky to the ominous 1934 Congress of Writers are indispensable key texts which, even at risk of duplication, could have had a place here. Sometimes the book quite perversely leaves us in the air. The advertisement for the 1923 Russfilm Script Competition arouses not unreasonable curiosity to know more about the entries and outcome.

The book has admirably full notes and appendices; though a lot of names from those teeming years have proved untraceable. Who, among the many personalities who clearly seemed exciting or important or controversial to the writers of the time, were Harrison and Manilov for example? In a couple of instances at least I can help. Glupshkin (p 306, 'not traced') was the name by which André Deed (alias Boireau, alias Gribouille, alias Cretinetti) was known in pre-Revolutionary Russia; 'Packson' (Poxon) was the actor John Bunny.

The first volume in Richard Taylor's new three-volume edition of Eisenstein's *Selected Works* includes four duplicated in *The Film Factory* and a few others that have appeared in Jay Leyda's collections. For the most part, however, they appear here in English for the first time, along with a perceptive introduction, embarking from the uncompromising premise that 'Sergei Eisenstein is by general consent the most important single figure in the history of the cinema.'

To read Eisenstein always refreshes astonishment at the range of his knowledge and references and connections and wit. Taylor's three volumes represent only a fraction of the huge literary output currently being collected in the multi-volume Soviet edition. They will, however, be central to the imminent reevaluation of Eisenstein, on the 90th anniversary of his birth and the 40th of his death.

DAVID ROBINSON

## EISENSTEIN AT 90

July 20–23, 1988

Keble College,  
Oxford

The British Film Institute and the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, announce an international conference to mark the opening of their major exhibition devoted to the life and career of Sergei Eisenstein. In this ninetieth anniversary year of Eisenstein's birth, the exhibition will include the largest selection of his drawings and designs so far publicly exhibited; and it is accompanied by BFI Publishing/Indiana University Press's important new edition of Eisenstein's writings.

It is the wealth of newly available material by and on Eisenstein that provides the impetus for a gathering of scholars and students from many countries, including the Soviet Union. The conference will include contributions from leading experts, screenings of rare film material and a private view of the Eisenstein exhibition at Oxford's Museum of Modern Art, as well as a round-table discussion of future directions in Eisenstein studies.

Since accommodation at Keble College is limited, early booking is recommended and all inquiries should be addressed to:

Ian Christie,  
Distribution Division,  
British Film Institute,  
21 Stephen Street,  
London W1P 1PL.

Telephone 01-255 1444  
Telex 27624 BFILDNG  
Fax 01-436 7950

## A gift for paradox

### THE CINEMA OF ANDREI TARKOVSKY

by Mark Le Fanu

BFL/£16 (£7.95)

Mark Le Fanu's short study has the melancholy distinction of being definitive. Tarkovsky died in December 1986, and the book therefore deals with the complete work, seven major films: *Ivan's Childhood* (1962), *Andrei Roublev* (1966), *Solaris* (1972), *The Mirror* (1974), *Stalker* (1979), *Nostalgia* (1983) and *The Sacrifice* (1986).

No commentator on Tarkovsky can avoid returning again and again to two major topics: his ambiguity, and the paradox of his comparative freedom to make religious, at times explicitly Christian, films (until his virtual exile in 1984, following the Soviet authorities' hostile reception of *Nostalgia*). Perhaps the two things—the ambiguity and the immunity—are related. His own attitudes both to his work and to the authorities were sometimes unexpected. Le Fanu recalls an interview with Michel Ciment in which Tarkovsky defends the narrative obscurity of *Andrei Roublev* by citing Engels, no less, who had proposed that the higher the level of the work, the more 'disguised' its formal strategies were bound to become.

Perhaps this reference, itself, was a strategy deployed by a film-maker who knew that, however disguised, his vision and his preoccupations were not destined to find ready supporters at any official level. And no commentator—including, modestly, Le Fanu—will lay claim to have the key to this most majestic and most mysterious of artists.

There seems no question, at any rate, that private childhood memories and feelings form a pool of imagery which Tarkovsky feels under no obligation to 'explain' to spectators customarily comforted by narrative glosses. This is particularly true of *The Mirror*, where further ambiguity is invited by the frequent conflation of the wife and mother, played by the same actress. Yet, with a consistent gift for paradox, Tarkovsky rejected any Freudians anxious to bury their teeth in his tender offerings. Le Fanu points out that Kelvin in *Solaris* twice confuses his wife and mother by implication, and similar scenes are also found in *The Sacrifice*, while a wife is elided with a

mistress in *Nostalgia*.

Tarkovsky's parents scarcely lived together; his father Arseny is a respected poet (whom his son quotes often in the films) but resided mostly abroad making a living as a translator; Maria his mother gave up her dreams of a literary life to become a proof-reader while bringing up Andrei. The separation, says Le Fanu, seems not to have led to any resentment in Andrei; he revered both of them. Only in *The Sacrifice* is marriage turned away from, as Le Fanu notes, 'with a private and mysterious disgust' by Alexander; earlier protagonists have clung to it as a stabilising form of identity.

For example, the torture Kelvin goes through in seeing Hari desperately trying, as it were, to reincarnate herself (or, to put it another—perhaps Tarkovsky's—way; in seeing Kelvin desperately trying, by an act of subconscious will, to reincarnate her) is a measure of his failure to define himself even by reference to his deepest feelings. If the loved object, in which your being is invested, can be conjured up, inflated, deflated, shredded, reconstituted, blown away, seemingly at will—his, or someone else's?—and you, the victim, can be moved to ecstasy or despair at each manifestation, then what is the solid ground of your own identity? In a word, who in hell, or heaven, are you?

In a filmed interview Tarkovsky suggested that to know who you are is the prerequisite both for living rightly and for loving other people: 'He who doesn't know why he is here on earth cannot feel love for anyone else.' Is the ambiguity and confusion that, Le Fanu suggests, most viewers feel when confronted by Tarkovsky's work a result of a secret resentment that, if he knows so much, why isn't he telling us?

The fact is that Tarkovsky's work constantly delivers two slightly conflicting messages. By the extraordinary, intense beauty of his imagery he offers us a definition of the physical world which puts the cinema once and for all on a plane with the great painters and, for that matter, the great scientists; and settles that silly argument of hierarchy terminally. And secondly, confusingly, the apparent authority established by this lucid gaze, which watches us 'rolled round in earth's diurnal course with rock, and stones, and trees' (the connection with Wordsworth, or Blake, might repay study), at the last moment fails to deliver a correspondingly defined moral message. Tarkovsky is no Seventh Day Adventist.

In fact, he usually fails to deliver any moral message at all,

and one of Le Fanu's difficulties is to come to terms with a text which he would prefer to read in a moral framework, but which constantly proves itself to be visionary and mystical. Thus he finds himself asking, for instance, what purpose is served by the sacrifice that Alexander makes, and if it is to be read as failed or successful, self-denying or self-indulgent.

It seems to me more likely (and I offer the reading even more hesitantly than Le Fanu) that Tarkovsky didn't frame any such question. What he seems to be obsessed by is the negation of self, approached by the familiar route through childhood. The paradox is that at the heart of the search for the self in youth, childhood, home, the merging with the mother, you discover rather disconcertingly that at a certain reach of remoteness, far from defining yourself, he suggests, you disappear altogether. If there is a flavour specific to Tarkovsky, it is his ability both to welcome and to mourn that disappearance in images of unsurpassable poignancy.

Le Fanu draws proper and learned attention to his painterly influences and to that ability 'only to lay his glance on the world to confer on it beauty and significance.' Other virtues he takes for granted, where others may find none. Thus he praises *Andrei Roublev* for looking at the historical culture of Christianity 'in terms of its own profound inner rightness and grandeur'. He glosses the 'most daring proposition' of *Andrei Roublev* quite assertively as 'culture and religion belong to each other, indeed are each other.'

There is a curious gap between the quality of Tarkovsky's work and the virtues that Le Fanu wants to find in it. The film-maker's investigations are troubling mysteries, at best veiled epiphanies. The critic's findings are 'grandeur', 'classicism', 'purity', 'importance', 'authority'. In *Stalker*, 'the shots flow with classical rightness'. *The Sacrifice* seems to him 'to engage as powerfully as ever with a specific, mastered metaphysics of cinema.'

It is difficult to write about the finest cinema, in all conscience. There comes a point where language breaks down. It seems to me that Le Fanu has reached it here. But where Tarkovsky is concerned, who can blame him? The book asks all the right questions, and often finds charming answers, as when he reminds us that 'the embraces that attract Tarkovsky—focused not on the face but on the earlobes and on the nape of the neck—are governed by a familial tenderness.'

GAVIN MILLAR

## Notes in the dark

### MASS OBSERVATION AT THE MOVIES

edited by

Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan

Routledge/£39.95

'From the beginning film was of the highest interest to us,' wrote Tom Harrison in 1973. Consequently, the collection of papers on film is one of the largest items in the Mass Observation Archive at the University of Sussex, though very little of it had been published before this latest and most welcome excavation of the 50 storage boxes.

Cinema and *MO* were natural bedfellows. Not only was cinemagoing extremely popular in the 1930s, and thus a prime target for *MO*'s observational work on leisure, but cinema, in the shape of the documentary movement, was itself one of the prime movers behind the formation of *MO*. The major link between them is, of course, Humphrey Jennings, who undertook two projects for *MO* (which he had helped to found in 1936). The first was a montage-style book of accounts of events which took place on the day of the Coronation of George VI; this was entitled simply 'May 12 1937' and was republished last year by Faber and Faber. The second was the film *Spare Time*, which was actually produced by the *gro* Film Unit but drew directly on his *MO* work and also relied largely on montage. Significantly, part of *Spare Time* was shot in Bolton, where the bulk of *MO*'s cinema research was carried out.

What really unites Jennings' films and *MO*'s copious reports, however, is their extraordinary mingling of the surreal and the quotidian. As Jennings put it in his review of Herbert Read's *Surrealism*, 'to the real poet the front of the Bank of England may be as excellent a site for the appearance of poetry as the depths of the sea.' One of his own *MO* reports characteristically notes a 'contrast of bicycles, old boxes and rubbish with sunny garden seen through round-headed arches.'

Wisely, Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan largely follow the Jennings montage method and let the *MO* reports speak for themselves with the minimum of editorial comment. The vast amount of information, however, is helpfully divided into thematic sections: interviews with

## BOOK REVIEWS

cinema managers, detailed reports of audience reactions to *The Lion Has Wings*, *Let George Do It*, *The Great Dictator* and *Ships With Wings*, an analysis of cinemagoers' favourite fade-outs and humorous moments, a report on audience preferences in film themes, and analyses of reactions to newsreels and Ministry of Information shorts.

Quite apart from the staggering amount of detail amassed by the Observers, there is something decidedly Bouvard and Pécuchet-like about the assiduity with which they set about their task. During the early years of the war Home Intelligence relied on MO's reports to create a kind of 'morale barometer' based on indicators such as numbers of people carrying gas masks, dreams about Hitler, rumours, jokes, graffiti and, of course, the behaviour of people at cinemas, especially their response to government and propaganda films.

Here MO's enthusiasm knew no bounds. For example, the following tip on how to take notes in the dark: 'Observer uses a notebook with pages turning from top so that a page once used goes underneath as extra support; writes on his knee, though a gas mask makes a useful table. Uses his left thumb to mark the place; as he writes a line he moves his thumb down half an inch and begins his next entry there. This removes both overwriting and leaving long gaps.'

Applause was counted in seconds. Coughing was regarded as a sign of boredom, as was talking at the end of a sequence. In the most detailed analyses films were broken down into sequences and audience reactions to each carefully noted. In the case of *The Lion Has Wings*, a comparative table was compiled of reactions at showings at five different cinemas. At one of these the opening shots of the English countryside, over which the commentary intones 'This is England where we believe in freedom', elicits the response from one spectator 'That looks like Lyme Regis'. Scenes of Nazi brutality in *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* are received thus: 'One woman tut-tuts. Old woman in front of observer now asleep; remains so for rest of picture. Sundry snorts at shots of ranting Germans.'

Not altogether surprisingly, given the spy-mania of the early days of the war, all this frenzied note-taking occasionally led to complications. Thus Miss E. J. A. from Watford writes in 1941 that, 'Last Monday two women objected to my writing and reported it to the manager. Later he sent for me and asked me to explain.' Not satisfied with her explanation he reported her

to the police, from whom she duly received a visit.

None of this, however, is to give the impression that MO is interesting only as an example of British eccentricity or as a form of unintentional Surrealism. Undoubtedly, its mass of observations did reveal some interesting and useful findings. For example, audience reactions to the newsreels showed that they were on the whole popular but were disliked if they were overtly propagandist ('there's too much glorious Britain, triumphant Britain about them'), too realistic ('you get a lot of destruction in them and my lady doesn't like it'), or simply lacking in 'real news'.

Work on feature films revealed that comedies were preferred over dramas and that topical films were well received providing they were not 'excessively realistic or particularly unpleasant.' Again, obvious propaganda was not popular. Not untypical was this criticism of *The Lion Has Wings*: 'It was too much propaganda. I think it un-British to shove propaganda down your throat like that. They should regard us as more intelligent than that.' On the other hand, a comparison of press and public reaction to *Let George Do It* showed that while the press tended to regard it as propaganda, and bad propaganda at that, audiences tended not to see it as propaganda at all.

As Richards and Sheridan note in their introduction, 'Mass Observation discovered a good deal about which films people liked and why, about what it was like to go to the cinema in the 1930s and 1940s, about the role of the cinema in people's lives, about how the cinema responded to and depicted the war. In effect and invaluable they monitored the views of the man and woman in the stalls.'

In particular MO's analysis of people's favourite fade-outs testifies to what Len England at the time called 'a most remarkable neglect of any films with social content.' He concluded, 'The most memorable fade-outs are those connected with death and with life after death, particularly those which treat the theme in an uplifting manner; the hero or the heroine dies bravely and unafraid, or the future world is depicted as a joyful spot where those parted in this world meet again. On these points men and women agree.' Or in the inimitable words of the manager of the Embassy Cinema, Bolton: 'Musical pictures in Lancashire go the best for any. Mystery pictures are nowhere. Give them anything they have to think about and they're lost.'

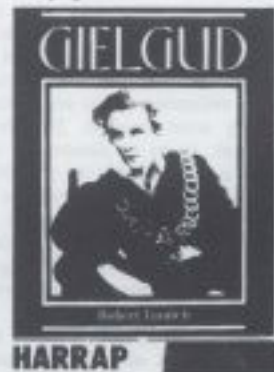
JULIAN PETLEY

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## Fallen Idol

### THE FILMS OF CAROL REED

by Robert F. Moss  
Macmillan/£29.50

Carol Reed, wrote Basil Wright in 1949, 'is not only the first really great director Britain has yet produced, but also one of the best directors anywhere in the world today.' Tastes change, of course, and reputations crumble; but so decisively has Reed dropped from the critical pantheon that Wright's assessment now seems not so much provocative as perverse. At the time, though, it verged on the cautious—in some quarters Reed was unreservedly hailed as 'the greatest living director'. Yet within ten years, his career foundering amid glitzy trivia (*Trapeze*) and sententious flops (*The Key*), he could be dismissed by SIGHT AND SOUND as 'a great technician'. No other British director has fallen so far, so fast.

The nearest parallel, perhaps, might be with Carné—another masterly craftsman, director of a brief string of acclaimed and

enduring classics, who saw his subsequent output written off as negligible. (On this analogy, Graham Greene would stand in for Jacques Prévert.) The affinity isn't confined to career-patterns, either; something of Carné's rich vein of urban fatalism, as Robert Moss points out, suffuses much of Reed's work, and *Odd Man Out* in particular.

It's around *Odd Man Out* that arguments for or against Reed tend to coalesce. (*The Third Man*, of course, remains as beguiling as ever, but increasingly liable to annexation, dark-velvet baroque angles and all, into the Wellesian canon.) Admirers of *Odd Man Out* echo James Agee's verdict—'a reckless, head-on attempt at greatness, and the attempt frequently succeeds'—while Reed's detractors find it pretentious and, for all the supposed reticence of his style, tiresomely over-directed. Dr Moss, at least, is in no doubt; he devotes a full chapter to the film, heading it 'Reed's Masterpiece'.

Moss's aim is unequivocal: to restore Reed, whom he considers a neglected genius, to his rightful stature as one of the world's great directors. Sensibly, he avoids overclaiming—for the most part, at any rate. Nobody could do much to rescue Reed's

dispiriting final pair of movies, *The Last Warrior* and *Fallow Me*, and Moss doesn't even try. Nor does he elevate the prewar films beyond their likeable merits, although it's a pity he didn't get to see *Laburnum Grove*, the Priestley adaptation that drew such a sigh of relief from Greene in *The Spectator*: 'Here at last is an English film one can unreservedly praise.'

Indeed, although Moss may dispute the overall valuation of Reed's oeuvre, his assessment of the relative standing of the films within it follows pretty much the accepted, neatly symmetrical pattern. The central trilogy—*Odd Man Out*, *The Fallen Idol* and *The Third Man*—come in for the major share of attention, with the films on each side leading up to or away from them like figures on a classical pediment. The trilogy's Conradian pendant, *Outcast of the Islands*, gains the consolation prize of 'underrated'—but then, it nearly always does. At one point Moss seems about to adopt a less predictable stance: 'Although it is a critical commonplace that Reed's work took an abrupt nosedive as soon as his "American period" began, it is possible . . . to argue just the opposite.' But all this bold contention comes down to, in the end, is an unexceptionable preference for *Our Man in Havana* over *A Kid for Two Farthings*.

There's no reason, of course, why an account of Reed's work should take an ostentatiously revisionist tack just for the sake of it—disparaging, say, *The Third Man* while crying up *Kipps* or *The Running Man* as an unsung masterpiece. Still, any critic setting out to urge the rehabilitation of his chosen director should perhaps aim to offer, if not surprise, then at least the illumination of fresh insight. Moss's judgments, as far as they go, are sensible, and lucidly presented. But I doubt if anyone with a passable working knowledge of Reed's films will be sent back to them with a realerted eye.

There's little attempt, either, to place Reed's work within its social or historical context; the films are treated as independent artefacts, unrelated to the drives and cross-currents of the society around them. Yet *Odd Man Out*, for one, raises some intriguing questions—not least how, in 1947 Britain, a film could be made inviting sympathy for an IRA gunman on the run (what chance would a remake stand today?) and doing so, what's more, in a narrative structure recalling all those war movies in which Allied fugitives evade the Nazis. Comparison with other British films on Ireland could have been revealing, too—such as Ealing's rarely screened ex-

ursion into the Troubles, *The Gentle Gunman*. Reed may have considered himself 'a man without a message', but that hardly absolves a critic from probing into the ideological underpinnings of the movies he directed.

It's probably naive, these days, to expect a book costing all but £30, from a reputable publisher (and not over lavishly illustrated, either), to be decently edited. Misprints and misspellings can be shrugged off, though it's irritating to find Basil Deardon show up as 'Deardon' throughout. Straight misinformation, however, in what purports to be an authoritative work, is something else again. Thus the composer Arthur Honegger is rechristened Paul, the direction of *Hue and Cry* is credited to its producer Henry Cornelius, and Jack Clayton's slim filmography is augmented by something called *Our Father's House*. Strangest of all is the appearance of a hitherto undiscovered H. G. Wells novel entitled *Love and Mr Windham*. Such laxity makes a poor memorial to a film-maker renowned for his own meticulous attention to detail.

The graph of Reed's career is familiar enough, though no less melancholy for that; from being immoderately overhyped—not that the director himself, a modest and self-deprecating man, lent any encouragement—his critical stock has sunk unjustly low. Re-evaluation is overdue, and the appearance of a full-length study, for all its limitations, should with any luck aid the process. Admirers of his films will find solid arguments here to corroborate their views; but those who, like David Thomson, regard Reed as 'a characterless director', incapable of transcending the inherent quality of his material, are unlikely to rethink their opinions without subtler and more cogent inducements.

PHILIP KEMP

### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

CLAIRE BARWELL is a film-maker and freelance researcher . . . WILLIAM FISHER is Paris correspondent of *Screen International* . . . GIULIANA MERCOLO is a former university lecturer specialising in Italian literature, a journalist and translator and has reviewed films for the *Independent* and other journals . . . ANTHONY SMITH has been Director of the IFFI since 1979 and is President-designate of Magdalen College, Oxford . . . CHARLES TAYLOR is film critic for the *Boston Phoenix* . . . JOHN WYWER is a writer and independent producer with Illuminations (Television) Ltd.

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## Wright and Anstey

SEE.—In the obituaries of Basil Wright and Edgar Anstey (Winter 1987/88), Elizabeth Sussex writes that both of them 'spent the war years producing umpteen (sic) propaganda films.'

To myself who saw these films 'relating to the national effort' many times at the sharp end, that is in remote village halls, great underground aircraft factories, women's institutes and smoke-filled miners' clubs, along with people most of whom had never seen films like this before (or, in some cases, had never seen films of any kind), her remark seems unduly offhand and, whether unconsciously or not so, dismissive. During World War Two, every film shown was, in one way or another, 'propaganda'. (As Michael Balcon recalled in August, 1946: 'Supplies of material and labour were virtually dependent upon the producer persuading the Government that the film was one of "national importance".') But Wright or Anstey explaining how to get the wounded out of the rubble from the overnight air raids or conveying information about the physiology and health of children, as valid today as then, was far less 'propaganda' than Merle Oberon announcing her war aims to camera.

The achievements in those days of Wright and Anstey and others at Crown, Realist, Film Centre and elsewhere shouldn't be minimised. They represent a tradition, a whole dimension, in at least two important ways.

Today, the inheritors of that tradition work in television, interpreting fact, and especially scientific fact, for mass audiences. Their films, rather than those of their counterparts in television drama, go to justify whatever truth there may be in the cliché that 'Britain has the best television in the world'.

The activities of Wright and Anstey and the others during World War Two are of lasting significance in another sense. It is one that should interest the readers of *SIGHT AND SOUND*, since it concerns the evolution of the British Film Institute as we know it today.

As is well known, the Institute and the (C) Film Unit, the focus for British documentary films in the 1930s, were both set up in 1933 and were soon at loggerheads. A year later, the unease and indeed hostility between them was reflected in this curious and often quoted sentence from the Report of a Commons Select Committee on Estimates: 'The continuance and the expansion of the (C) Film Unit would practically stultify the British Film Institute and its

functions.' The malaise continued until 1940, during which time the Institute developed into a useful if somewhat unexciting institution, largely preoccupied with the pedagogical film. After Dunkirk, the unit was in effect excluded from the mainstream of official activities, which were taken over for the duration by the documentary film group, operating through the (C) Films Division of which Crown (i.e., the (C) Film Unit, *redivivus*) was part. By 1945, the Films Division (later (C) Films Division) had acquired considerable prestige. In consequence, the Division and, through it, the documentary group were able to influence markedly the course of events immediately after the war. Because of their wartime films, Basil Wright and Edgar Anstey were undoubtedly major, if sometimes offstage, protagonists in these events.

The unit continued more or less as before until the departure of Oliver Bell, the Director from 1936 to 1949. He was succeeded by Denis Forman, the Chief Production Officer at the (C) Films Division, and the transformation of the Institute into the world centre of film it now is, was begun. It is quite inconceivable that this transformation could have happened if it hadn't been for the wartime developments in which Basil Wright and Edgar Anstey's 'umpteens' films played a not unmemorable part.

Yours faithfully,  
JOHN MADDOX  
Buddleigh Salterton

## Chinese crackers

SEE.—I've been reading Alan Stanbrook's recent writings on Oriental cinema in *SIGHT AND SOUND* with a mixture of bemusement and disquiet. Bemusement because Stanbrook's reserves of enthusiasm so obviously outweigh his store of background knowledge; disquiet because his many errors of fact, emphasis and interpretation are potentially compromising to some of the film-makers he writes about, especially those under political thumbs in China.

The fundamental problem underlying 'The Flowers in China's Courtyard' (Summer 1987) is Stanbrook's inability to distinguish between the truths, half-truths and outright lies that his interviewees told him. This leads him to misrepresent the controversy that has dominated Chinese cinema since the summer of 1986. The issues cannot, in fact, be reduced to a clash of personalities and policies between two studio-heads, Wu Yigong in Shanghai and Wu Tianming in Xi'an. Far more threatening for film-makers (as for artists in other fields) is

the revived campaign against 'bourgeois liberalism', a campaign deliberately defined so vaguely that it permits the Maoist Left in the Politburo to snipe at anything it objects to.

Stanbrook barely acknowledges the existence of this campaign, although it was at its height while he was conducting his interviews. Neither does it say much for his overall grasp of the situation that he attributes the change in climate to a change in the ministerial accountability of the Film Bureau, but fails to mention the way that the Film Bureau has found itself increasingly often overruled by outside agencies—notably the army, in the cases of the films *The Dove Tree*, *The Big Parade* and *In Their Prime*. There are other problems too. Stanbrook's summary of Wu Yigong's position is wholly wrong (why didn't he go to the horse's mouth in the 30 April issue of the newspaper *Guangming Ribao*?), and his version of Wu Tianming's challenges to the film establishment is distinctly economical with the truth.

There is sadly no doubt that rough times are ahead for the 'New Chinese Cinema', but Stanbrook's claim that in the present climate 'the more famous direc-

tors... are taking few risks' seems like a libel on film-makers who are actually putting their careers on the line for work they believe in. And it's hardly an adequate excuse that the claim is based on nothing more than the viewing of rushes from two unfinished films, Wu Tianming's *Old Well* (which is not in any sense a 'disaster movie') and Chen Kaige's *King of the Children* (which has no more need of a 'strong narrative drive' than Chen's earlier films had) have turned out to be the directors' best and bravest work, and friends in China assure me that they are equalled by newly finished films from Zhang Yimou and Zhang Zeming. Stanbrook is right that Tian Zhuangzhuang's latest film is 'more conventional' than the two before it, but wrong about the reason: Tian was obliged to fulfil his contract to direct for Beijing Film Studio, and he chose to adapt Lao She's *Gushu Yiren* (without much enthusiasm) because it was the best of the projects offered to him. Where is the evidence that China's leading directors are cowering in corners until the storm passes?

Just as objectionable are Stanbrook's garbled accounts of Film Bureau action against various

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films. Most of the many changes demanded in *The One and the Eight* concerned the role of the wronged Communist officer; the episode that Stanbrook calls 'a key scene' is in fact quite marginal. *Horse Thief* came in for only minor modifications, was never attacked by Tibetans and has never been banned from export. It is false to say that Chen Kaige agreed to re-cut and re-voice *The Big Parade* with cheerful equanimity. It was precisely his refusal to make the changes that delayed the film's completion for so long. He finally made them for the sake of his producers in Guangxi Film Studio, a tiny regional studio that could not afford to write off the production costs and desperately needed the revenue from distribution. Furthermore, it's nonsense to say that Chen intended to end the film on 'the image of an empty screen'. He actually planned to close with shots of a depopulated Tiananmen Square (in the centre of Beijing) with just the sound of the parade overlaid.

Worst of all is the paragraph on the banning of *The Dove Tree*, not least because Wu Ziniu's name is misspelled throughout. Stanbrook apparently accepts the official excuse for the ban (that the film was a technically incompetent 'debacle') despite the excellent track record of Wu's first two films. Unforgivably, he then goes on to describe the film as if he'd seen it! I have seen a little of the film, and have discussed it at length with Wu Ziniu. I wouldn't parlay the little I know into speculations about the plot or visual style, but I can categorically refute both Stanbrook's 'description' and the charge of incompetence. What is most amazing here is that Stanbrook doesn't see the danger of writing about a controversial film on the basis of hearsay, without even admitting that that's what he's doing.

One more thing: the assertion that current students at the Beijing Film Academy have no time for European art cinema but are in thrall to Hollywood is pure and simple tosh. I was a guest lecturer at the Academy last year, and my course included classes on Antonioni (*Identification of a Woman*) and Fassbinder (*Querelle*). Not only were the students passionately interested in these films, they were also much better informed about the directors than many equivalent classes in the West would be. That doesn't mean, of course, that they aren't interested in Hitchcock and Spielberg as well.

Stanbrook's wrong-headedness about Japanese cinema in 'Tokyo's New Satirists' (Winter 87/88) is of less consequence, for

the obvious reason that there are plenty of other voices on Japanese film. His preamble invites us to believe that Japanese directors have recently rediscovered a vein of humour lost since the 1930s, and challenges us to recall any 'top-flight comedies' from the 50s and 60s. Well, off the top of my head I can come up with films by Ozu (*Ohayo*, etc), Kinoshita (the *Carmen* films, etc), Kurosawa (*Yojimbo*, *Sanshiro*), Oshima, Imamura, Suzuki Seijun, Kawashima Yuzo, Yamada Yoji, Yoshimura Kazuburo and Okamoto Kihachi—and that's not counting any of the popular comedy series that never got exported. Has Stanbrook not yet stumbled upon the work of these directors? He clearly hasn't noticed that two of the films he discusses make specific reference back to films of the 50s and 60s: *The Funeral* is crammed with references to Ozu's family tragi-comedies, and *Crazy Family* casts Ueki Hitoshi as the grandfather in order to invoke the old *Irresponsible* film series.

If Stanbrook is not much of a hound when it comes to sniffing out the truffles of the Japanese comedy tradition, then at least he's better value in generating laughs of his own. Anyone with a broad grasp of Japanese culture will crack up at the thought that the films discussed form some kind of genre or movement in Japanese cinema, and even more at the thought that this putative return to satire constitutes 'the flavour of the decade'. And I, for one, don't know whether to laugh or cry over the patronising description of Hayashi Kaizo as a Dostoevsky-Rousseau-like primitive.

But there is also an element of pathos here, since Stanbrook fails to recognise when a joke is on him. He takes at face value the statement by the authors of *Crazy Family* which brackets *The Family Game* with Hollywood films like *Kramer vs. Kramer*—blithely unaware that the comparison is itself a joke. Ishii and Morita are in reality close friends, and *The Family Game* was a landmark film for the entire generation of independent directors to which they both belong; the first mainstream success by a graduate from Super-8 film-making. Stanbrook also garbles his account of the meaning of *Gyakufansha Kazoku*, the original title of *Crazy Family*. It has nothing to do with aircraft landing techniques, and everything to do with self-destruction.

Incidentally, the Kinema Junpo awards are voted exclusively by critics, and are not 'the Japanese equivalent of the Oscars'.

Yours faithfully,  
TONY RAYNS  
London SW2

ALAN STANBROOK replies: As a very small nut, I am, indeed, honoured that my work has been deemed worthy of the full Tony Rayns sledgehammer treatment. I am grateful to him for pointing out that my summary of Wu Yigong's position is 'wholly wrong' and that I am 'economical with the truth' in describing the work of Wu Tianming. I just wish I had the courage to make such cavalier and unsupported accusations in return.

Is the episode I cited from *One and the Eight* so marginal? It turns what might have been a poignant ending into a ludicrous one: just one of 70 changes maybe, but it spoils the movie. And is the Film Bureau-inspired modification to *The Horse Thief* so minor? The (imposed) opening caption now sets the action in 1923—i.e., a safe 27 years before the Chinese marched in, so all this benightedness Tian Zhuang-zhuang is depicting is now seen to be a feature of the pre-Communist past.

I fear that Mr Rayns has got into such a tizzy over some aspects of my article that he misreads and misquotes me. I did not say that Chen Kaige agreed to changes to *The Big Parade* 'with cheerful equanimity' but that he now 'cheerfully attributes the changes he had to make... to his obligation to the studio to make a successful film.' Which is what Tony Rayns implies. I do, however, accept that my Chinese interpreter may have done less than justice to Chen's intentions in saying that he planned to end the film 'with the image of an empty screen'.

With regard to *The Dove Tree*, I clearly failed if my comments could be interpreted as endorsing the official line. The intention was to question whether the ban was justified. I envy Tony Rayns the 'little of the film' he has been able to see and the confidence this gives him to pass judgment on the whole movie. But from what I know of Wu's other work, it is, indeed, hard to credit the charges levelled against it. I had hoped that would show through. Incidentally, since Wu's name looks in Chinese nothing like Mr Rayns' Romanised spelling, I fail to see how it can be regarded as misspelled based only on the convention he adopts.

On the question of the cinematic interests of China's sixth generation, I confess that I have to rely on what Zheng Dongtian, chairman of the directing department at the Beijing Film Academy, told me. If the Chinese students do prefer Fassbinder to Spielberg, it must have escaped him. Having now seen Wu Tianming's *Old Well* in its entirety I am happy to withdraw my reservations, based on seeing

merely an hour of the then uncompleted film. I have not yet seen *King of the Children* in full, but admitted in my article that my comments were provisional. Comments on work in progress seem to me to be permissible with the customary caveats.

Turning to the Tokyo satirists article, I still maintain that Japanese comedies from the 50s and 60s are comparatively few, less than top-flight and not so well remembered as the dramas and costume pictures. *Ohayo*, in my view, is not the equal of *I was born, but...* Nor is Shindo's *Lost Sex* a match for Goshu's *The Neighbour's Wife and Mine*. But Tony Rayns is entitled to think what he likes. I must, however, take issue with him over *Crazy Family*. If, as we are now told, everything its makers have so far said publicly about the reasons for making it is to be treated as a joke, at what point can we believe them?

## Italian ears

SIR,—When I read the article by John Minchinton 'Fitting Titles' (Autumn 1987), I realised how lucky you English people are. While you can discuss the subtitled art, in Italy we hardly know about it. Here everything is dubbed and the exception (recently, *Full Metal Jacket*) proves the rule. When we go to the cinema to see a foreign film, we have no choice: either we take it dubbed or we leave it.

Not to mention what our Italian ears hear when old films (in particular, American classics of the 30s and 40s) are televised, especially if they have never been released in Italy. Not only is the dialogue poorly dubbed (who cares if it was originally delivered by Mae West or W. C. Fields, John Barrymore or Carole Lombard...?) but, in default of the m/k tracks, the music and the sound effects are also entirely remade. As a result, in the Italian televised version of Borzago's *A Farewell to Arms*, we can hear the Fred Astaire song 'Lovely to Look At' used as background for the final scene, when Helen Hayes dies in Gary Cooper's arms.

Yours faithfully,  
PIETRA PATAT  
La Cineteca del Friuli  
Gemona

## Elisabeth Welch

SIR,—Alan Stanbrook is absolutely correct when he says that the British film industry never really had the courage to employ Elisabeth Welch (Winter 1987/88). The industry's neglect of this versatile singer-actress is regrettable. However, it has to be put on record that Miss Welch has made film appearances in





# ON NOW

## ●DARK EYES

(Curzon)

A skein of Chekhov stories spun in flashback out of a shipboard encounter between a wryly self-deprecating Italian (Marcello Mastroianni) and a stolid Russian to whom he confides the farcical tragedy of his life. A *dolce far niente* dreamer, Mastroianni recalls the wealthy marriage that made him a bird in a gilded cage; the encounter at a spa with a lady with a little dog which opened new vistas of romance and sent him winging off to Russia in her wake; the return to seek divorce that landed him in a fresh trap, leaving him now as errand and heartbreak as the Flying Dutchman. And all the while the Russian gravely listens, both men blithely unaware that his happiness—he has just won the love of his life after nine proposals and years of patience—points a moral somewhere. It's an enchanting idea, mostly enchantingly executed. A little comic overemphasis, a touch of the Fellinis in the spa sequences; otherwise gorgeous to look at, superbly acted, and tenderly, quirkily funny. (Elena Sofonova, Silvana Mangano, Innokenti Smoktunovskii; director, Nikita Mikhalkov.)

## ●ROUGE BAISER

(Other Cinema)

An evocative title, referring either to the vampire kiss of Communism or to a popular brand of lipstick. Both have their lures for 15-year-old Nadia (Charlotte Valandrey) in the Paris of 1952. Parisienne born and bred, but a second generation Polish-Jewish-Communist, she's a good party member but not such a good girl, hanging out with the local yobs until a fateful encounter sees her rescued from a violent clash between police and demonstrators by a *Paris Match* photo-journalist (Lambert Wilson) who whisks her off, protesting, into the brave new world of St Germain jazz clubs. Love stirs, just in time to rhyme its disillusionment with the political collapse of Stalinism, leaving her on the verge of becoming her own woman while the embittered Lambert, hitherto uncommitted, goes off to Indo-China as a *para* (and we know what that probably means). Beautifully detailed, generous in spirit, and much less predictable than it may sound, Vera Belmont's second (partly autobiographical) feature is a real charmer.

## APPOINTMENT WITH DEATH

(Cannon)

A strangled attempt by Golan and Globus to revive the Agatha Christie series, with the setting of 30s Palestine allowing Peter

Ustinov's Poirot to voice some unlikely Zionist statements. (Lauren Bacall, Carrie Fisher, John Gielgud; director, Michael Winner.)

## BARFLY

(Cannon)

An original screenplay by Charles Bukowski, iconic poet of the inebriates, recaptures the alleged contentment of his younger years as a drunken drop-out. Mickey Rourke shambles comfortably in the skid-row twilight mumbling gleeful one-liners and Barbet Schroeder's direction is respectfully mellow, but the writer's fierce affection for the gutters remains contrived and unattractive. (Faye Dunaway, Alice Krige, Frank Stallone.)

## BATTERIES NOT INCLUDED

(UIP)

If Steven Spielberg hasn't yet made his *It's a Wonderful Life* (as he says in interviews), he is orbiting closer with this slice of whimsy about 'little people' banding together to save their building from high-rise pirates. Produced by the Spielberg team, sleekly if anonymously directed by Matthew Robbins, with the cutest crew of aliens yet. (Hume Cronyn, Jessica Tandy, Frank McRae.)

## BRAIN DAMAGE

(Palace)

A young man strikes a bargain with Elmer, a monster; he will provide the creature with its food, human brains, if it will keep injecting him with its hallucinatory secretions. Bizarre but sluggish; from Frank Henenlotter, director of *Basket Case*. (Rick Herbst.)

## THE COURIER

(Palace)

A lacklustre thriller set in the drab streets of Dublin where a leatherclad despatch rider takes on vice king Gabriel Byrne. Despite some modish violence, essentially an 'Edgar Wallace Presents' programmer for the 80s. (Ian Bannen, Pdraig O'Loingsigh, Cait O'Riordan; directors, Frank Deasy, Joe Lee.)

## FIVE CORNERS

(Recorded Releasing)

The Bronx, Halloween 1964. The local psycho comes out of jail and tries to rekindle his one-sided romance with pet-shop princess Jodie Foster. She still cringes at the sight of him. A long-standing neighbourhood feud is foiled by the influence of Martin Luther King. An engaging item, pitched between *American Graffiti* and Abel Ferrara's New York City nightmares. (John Turturro, Tim Robbins; director, Tony Bill.)

## A FLAME IN MY HEART

(Mainline)

With its low budget reflected by scratchy black and white photography, Alain Tanner's all but plotless look at romantic agony among Parisian neo-bohemians comes over as a dire miscalculation. For all the frankness, it is Morpheus not Eros who presides. (Myriam Mézières, Benoît Régent.)

## JANE AND THE LOST CITY

(Blue Dolphin)

Jane (late of the wartime *Daily Mirror* strip) attempts to carry on *Romancing the Stone* but winds up in a dispiriting romp through the leftover tid-bits of Cannon's *Allan Quatermain and the Lost City of Gold*. (Maud Adams, Jasper Carrot, Graham Stark; director, Terry Marcel.)

## THE LONELY PASSION OF JUDITH HEARNE

(Recorded Releasing)

Stifled romance and cynical lust mingle in the peculiarly awful atmosphere of a pious Dublin boarding-house. Brian Moore at his most melancholy; and Maggie Smith, as Miss Hearne, in the end willfully turning aside from earthly happiness, at her most knotted. Among some notable performances, Ian McNeice stands out as the landlady's spitefully sinister mummy's boy. Jack Clayton directs this chilly tale with old-fashioned exactitude. (Bob Hoskins, Wendy Hiller, Marie Kean.)

## NUTS

(Warner Bros)

Everyone in *Nuts* is supposed to think Barbra Streisand, a high-priced hooker who has killed a client, is not mentally competent to stand trial; we know that she is just a zany, loveable superstar being put on her Oscar-winning mettle. The supporting cast (Richard Dreyfuss, Eli Wallach, Karl Malden) cope ably with permanent egg on their face. (Director, Martin Ritt.)

## ON THE BLACK HILL

(BFI)

Adaptation of Bruce Chatwin's crystalline novel about the twentieth-century lifespan of twin brothers who farm an unforgiving hillside on the Welsh border. Hellfire performance from Bob Peck, as the boys' father, and one of great dignity from Gemma Jones, as their suffering mother; but the unspoken mystery of the brothers' relationship evades writer-director Andrew Grieve. Coldly handsome photography by Thaddeus O'Sullivan. (Mike and Robert Gwilym.)

## ORPHANS

(UKFD)

Effectively a three-hander for two *enfants sauvages*—orphans left to fend for themselves, now grown up in isolation as bizarre, introverted animals—and the Chicago gangster they kidnap who tames them through his boundless instinct for fatherhood. Never shaking off its stage origins, it isn't exactly credible; terrific performances, though, and the game-playing (staged with great intensity) is fascinating. (Albert Finney, Matthew Modine, Kevin Anderson; director, Alan J. Pakula.)

## OVERBOARD

(UIP)

Washed ashore from husband's yacht, unspeakably rude heiress (Goldie Hawn) suffers amnesia; a carpenter (Kurt Russell), to whom she owes money, claims

her as his wife and maid of all work. Love blossoms, inevitably; engaging but very knockabout. (Director, Gary Marshall.)

## A PRAYER FOR THE DYING

(Guild)

Disillusioned IRA man (Mickey Rourke, sporting a persuasive accent) goes on the run and becomes the pawn of London gangsters. The lack of any political dimension is less regrettable than the picture's decline into a mawkish tale of redemption, though Alan Bates livens things up as the mobster chieftain lurking behind the undertaker's facade. (Director, Mike Hodges.)

## PRINCE OF DARKNESS

(Guild)

Some resemblances to *Assault on Precinct 13* in John Carpenter's horror yarn about a beleaguered crew of scientists striving to repulse some unfathomable satanic conspiracy tend to emphasise the concomitant lack of vitality. Not undiverting, but modest in more than just its intentions. (Donald Pleasence.)

## THE PRINCESS BRIDE

(Vestron)

A spirited and charming fairy tale, told by grandfather Peter Falk to a bedridden child. A Zorroesque avenger, a Spanish pirate and a giant try to prevent the marriage of the heroine to city prince Chris Sarandon. Inventively amusing, but it knows when to play the romance and derring-do straight. The best screen swordfight since Rathbone and Flynn hung up their foils. (Wallace Shawn, Cary Elwes; director, Rob Reiner.)

## SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER ME

(Columbia)

Elaborate lighting and decor are no substitute for tension in a feeble mix of cop thriller and romantic melodrama, in which homely married detective Tom Berenger is amorously compromised by socialist key witness whose life he is supposed to be protecting. (Mimi Rogers; director, Ridley Scott.)

## STAKEOUT

(Warner Bros)

Cop falls for girl he has under surveillance; girl's swivel-eyed boyfriend, a jailbreaker, is not best pleased. John Badham directs this pared, hard-edged caper with practised ease; and Richard Dreyfuss runs through his engaging comic range. (Emilio Estevez.)

## TIME TO DIE

(Artificial Eye)

The first film from an original screenplay by Gabriel Garcia Marquez looks rather like second-hand Garcia Marquez: an old man returns to his hometown in Colombia; an ancient blood feud still poisons the air; the creed of *machismo* and family honour ensures, not a death forestood this time, but one re-enacted. Watchable but basic revenge Western (Gustavo Angarita, Maria Eugenia Davila; director, Jorge Ali Triana.)

# THE NATIONAL FILM & TELEVISION SCHOOL

## *Some dates in the history of the School*

**August 1965:** The Rt. Hon. Jennie Lee MP,PC announced the appointment of a committee —

To consider the need for a National Film School and to advise, if necessary, on the objects and size of such a School, its possible location and form of organisation, and the means by which it might be financed.

**October 1965:** The Committee was established with Lord Lloyd of Hampstead in the Chair.

**June 1967:** Jennie Lee published the Lloyd Report.

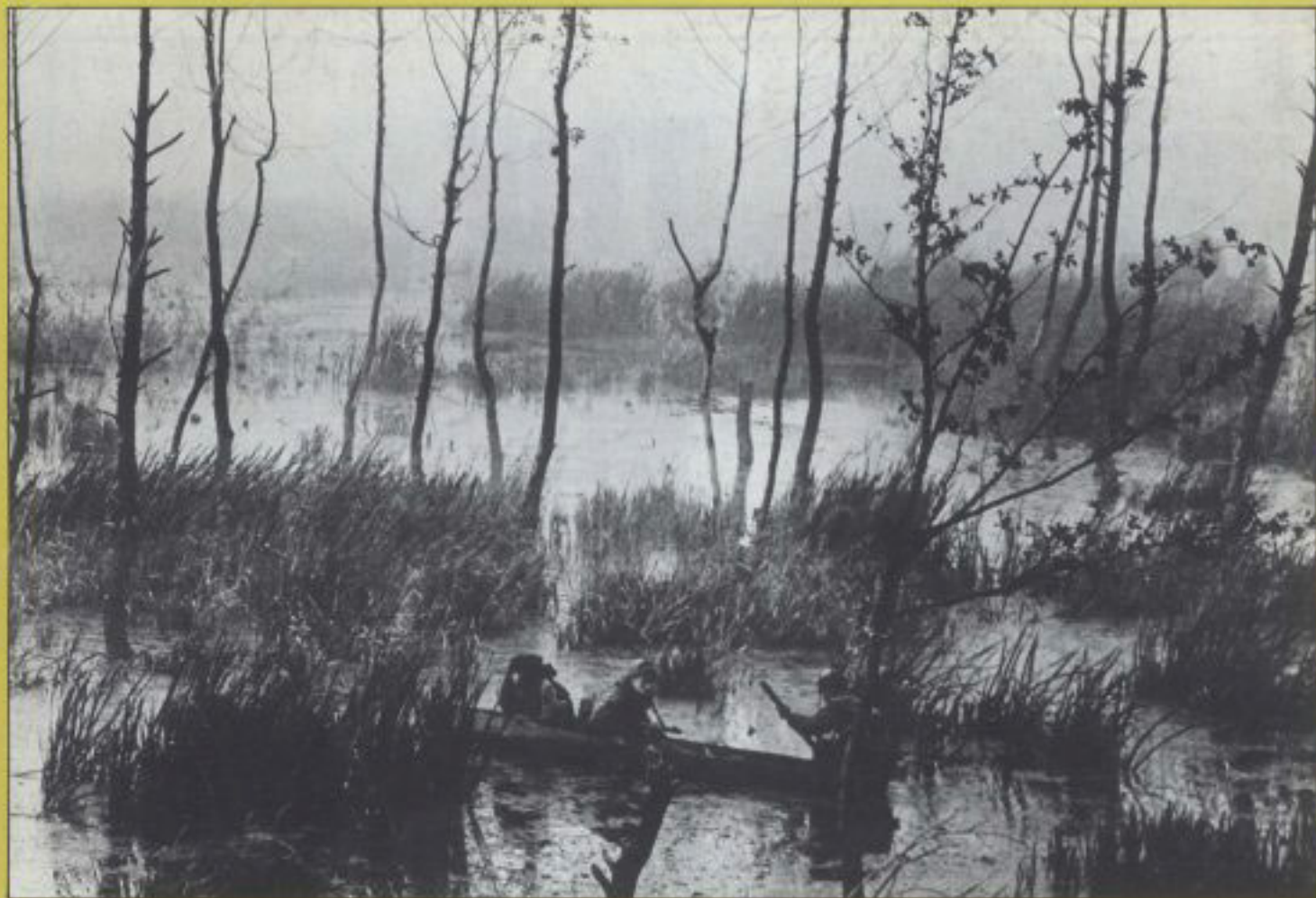
**June 1970:** The National Film School was incorporated, with Lord Lloyd as its Chairman.

**October 1971:** The School opened to its first intake at its studios in Beaconsfield.

Since 1965 one person has guided the fortunes of the School — its Chairman, Lord Lloyd of Hampstead. On 31st May 1988 he retires. A generation of film-makers is in his debt. He will be succeeded on 1st June by David Puttnam.

Colin Young, Director.

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